

# A Dialectic of the Hebrew Language

The Hebrew language is multifaceted. Many Hebrew words have both a surface meaning and deeper levels of meaning. These words can be mapped out as triangles. The left side of the triangle – the **thesis** – is the contractive side. The right side – the **antithesis**, is the expansive side. The **synthesis** of the paradoxical meanings is the word at the top of each triangle.

## Definitions

**Tzimtzum** – the dark space which is the first stage of Creation that is apparently empty of Hashem's presence.

**Dichotomy** – two polar opposite ideas -- the framework of free choice in the tzimtzum.

**Paradox** – the potential collaboration of opposite ideas.

**Dialectic** – a thought process that creates a dialogue between two opposite ideas.

**Synthesis** – the joining of two opposite thoughts into a balanced middle idea.

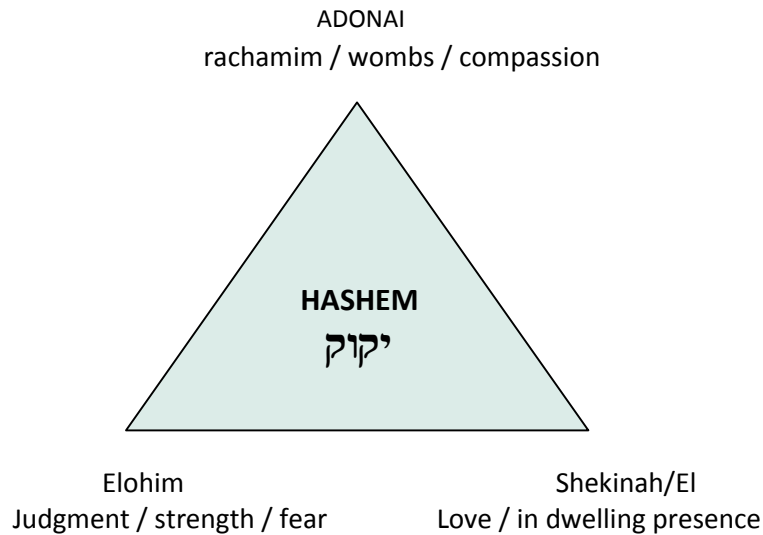
**Avodah Zara/ Ahavah Zara** – Projective realities that we think are the TRUTH.

**Step one** is seeing a **dichotomy**. The logical result of Creation is dichotomy. Dichotomy is the framework of free choice, for example, good and evil, male and female. Dichotomies – either/or thinking – are competitive and abrasive. Shekinah vs Elokim; Love vs. judgment and boundaries

**Step two** is transforming a dichotomy into a paradox – a potential collaboration of opposite ideas. It is a Paradox which is the potential collaboration between judgment and love.

**Step three** is the Torah dialectic essential to creating a dialogue between opposite ideas. It is a **Dialectic paradox**, the framework of truth. It is compassionate or womb-like since the womb both loves and protects the fetus, and also pushes the fetus out. This womb presence is the goal of the Torah for human consciousness. Yud Kei Vav Kei is the synthesis of Elokim and Shekinah expressing Hashem's ultimate mystery of compassionate presence, which synthesizes the polarized ideas. It is realizing that there are two sides to a coin, but both sides are the coin . . . and both are valid.

This triangle illustrates an example of the dialectic<sup>1</sup> method with the names of Hashem:

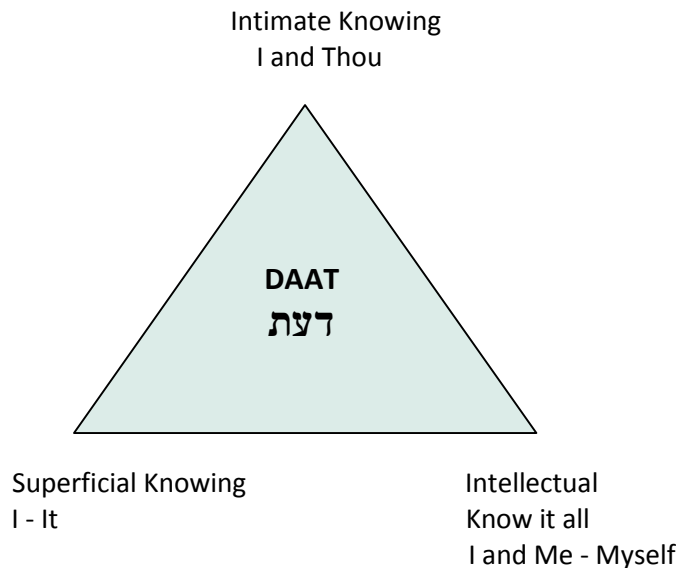


The presence of Hashem in nature is Elokim<sup>2</sup>. The natural consequence of choices creates the boundaries in which man operates – the ultimate boundary being death. In Torah, every person dies from their mistakes. Death is the cumulate result of choices rather than an accident of fate. Hashem's love for man is absolute. No one is rejected from that love, which is called Shekinah.

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<sup>1</sup> Dialectic: development through the stages of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in accordance with the laws of dialectical materialism: the investigation of this process: the theoretical application of this process especially in the social sciences ,usually plural but singular or plural in construction: any systematic reasoning, exposition, or argument that juxtaposes opposed or contradictory ideas and usually seeks to resolve their conflict

<sup>2</sup> This physical universe of ours operates according to the laws of nature as ordained by G-d in the beginning. The Hebrew Name used in the creation story we know is ELOHIM. The numerical value of this Name is equal to the value of the Hebrew term HaTeva (nature). Thus the natural universe of physical form is the creation of ELOHIM. The laws of nature are the expressions of ELOHIM. ELOHIM is the force and power underlying the physical universe.



Daat<sup>1</sup> is the most confusing of all the Spherot. It has these three valences and is also interchangeable with Keter. According to Martin Buber in his book *I and Thou*-- *Ich and Du*--there is a contrast between knowing things intellectually which is I-it, and knowing things intimately, which is I-Thou.

In the German language, there is a familiar "you" which is expressed as the word "thou" in English. I included the German because English is missing the intimate "you." When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, everything became confused. They were "naked and ashamed." With the advent of clothing -- *beged* -- which means "treachery," superficiality was introduced in the world, i.e. the book was now judged by its cover. Human beings have both an intellectual IQ related to superficial knowing and an emotional IQ related to intimate knowing.

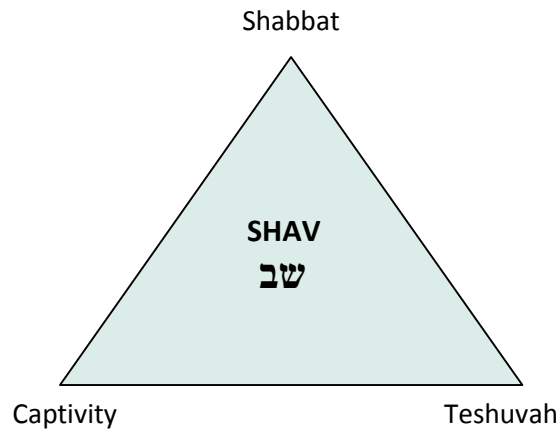
**Step one:** Superficial knowing is based on exploitation and relating only to the outer shells of reality. It is called "being nourished from the shells of the week." In the I-It relationship, things are reduced to their components.

**Step two:** Intellectual knowing can be very expansive but can often be perceived as one being a "know it all". It is a lonely place without intimacy.

**Step three:** Intimate knowing is being nourished from Shabbos, and is based on an ethical and contractual framework for love. The I-Thou relationship has a holistic connection that requires presence. Intimate knowing is a connection with the essence of G-d's life force in all things.

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<sup>1</sup> The ten Sephirot are divided into two groups. The three "upper" ones, associated with the "higher heavenly realms" is where we find **Keter-Crown**, **Chokmah-Wisdom**, and **Binah-Understanding**. **Da'at** -Knowledge emanates from the realm of Keter, Chokman and Binah.



**Shav:** Emptiness, vanity, lying (worthless speech)

The Torah's premise is that we are all **captive** in our individual projective worlds. The problem is that it is challenging to see the bars of our prison cell. We rationalize our projective realities, thereby making it difficult to change these basic patterns.

During the month of Elul, we read about a beautiful woman taken captive in battle<sup>1</sup>. That beautiful woman is our soul. She can only be freed through the process of **teshuvah** during Elul. Elul is an acrostic that stands for "I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me."<sup>2</sup> In Devarim, the beautiful woman cries for the losses of her loved ones. Our soul during Elul has to weep for the losses of her innocence. **Shabbat** is a time when we stop doing teshuvah in order to gain perspective and distance on our process. Shabbat also gives us the necessary joyous energy required to change old patterns.

**Teshuvah** (Return, or Repentance) is a gift from G-d, which allows us to erase our improper actions through a three-step process.

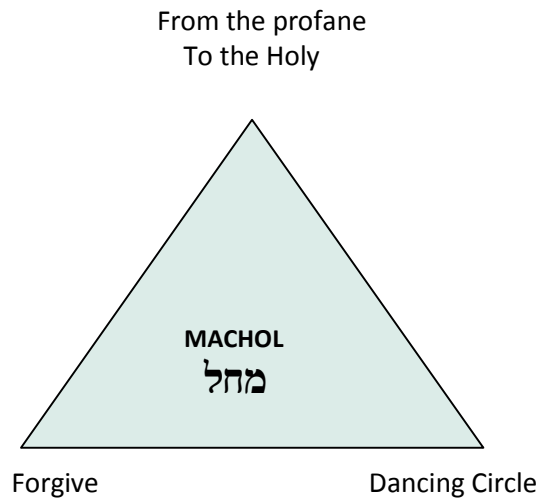
At the very beginning of the Laws of Repentance, when he is discussing the rules of genuine teshuvah, Maimonides explains that teshuvah requires confession, and that confession contains three elements:

- Admitting to having committed the sin.
- Expressing sincere regret for having committed it.
- Making a firm commitment never to do it again.

Without a confession that contains all these elements, complete atonement is impossible to attain no matter how sincere the sinner may be in his heart concerning his or her repentance.

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

<sup>2</sup> The mystery of the power of *teshuvah* is hinted in the letters of the name of the month Elul, *alef lamed vav lamed*, which are the first letters of the verse, **Ani Le-dodi Ve-dodi Li**. (I go to my Beloved and my Beloved comes to me.) (Song of Songs 6:3). **Ani Le-dodi**: Through my *teshuvah*, prayer, and *tzedakah* (support of righteous causes) during the month of Elul, I make the effort to reach my Beloved. **Ve-dodi Li**: and my Beloved comes to me on Rosh Ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur. Thus, during Elul, the month of divine favor, we always read the *parashah* which begins "When you take the initiative [go to war] in dealing with the unique challenges which your soul needs to confront [your enemies], and with G-d's help they will be delivered [into your hands] and within your power to defeat them[take them captive] ... (Devarim 21:10).



In the month of Elul, the key word is “**Machol.**” The word has these three meanings. It means **forgive** because in Elul we attempt to settle old conflicts and grudges. That’s on the constrictive side because it takes a lot discipline to seek forgiveness and make amends to people in our lives. On the right, expansive side, “Machol means “dancing circle.” This meaning emerges from the story in Judges 19 of the Pilegish of Givah. The dancing circle symbolizes the unity of women in overcoming competition in their relationships with other women for male attention.

The holiday of Tu B’av sets the tone for Elul in that the Jewish people had to relent on their grudges and raise their conflict from profane to holy. They did this by relenting on their grudge against the tribe of Benjamin. We have to turn the conflicts of Korach and Moses and bar Khamsa and the rabbis of the Talmud which are profane conflicts based on hurt egos into the **holy conflicts** of Hillel and Shamai. Holy conflicts result in new learning for all sides and profane conflicts end up in great pain and destruction for all sides. Profane conflicts are based on people who take things personally with their resultant hurt feelings. Holy conflicts are based on deep listening to opinions different from those of one’s own. This triangle guides us in all of our Avodah for the month of Elul.

In the Torah of reciprocity, through which we try to create an ethical shidduch with the people in our lives, we must first mess things up. Going around and saying to people, Machol li / forgive me is a disturbing process. I don’t know anyone who does this who isn’t in some way set off by it. If I say to you, “will you forgive me?” you probably begin to feel uneasy, because this sort of question can open up a whole can of worms. These conversations eventually come around to whatever feedback we may have for each other. In all of our Torah metaphors, we are always trying to mix the joy and the pain. But the question arises, why risk the pain? Maybe it’s just better to bury it, and forget about it. So in not allowing us to do this, Elul really puts us on edge, particularly in the area of disinterring the stuff that’s buried in the unconscious. This is all part of the experience of blowing the Shofar, but the idea behind it is that, just as sleep can be an exercise of consciously becoming unconscious, so Elul is an instance of the conscious going into the unconscious.

Some of the lessons I learned from my teacher, Rabbi Shloime Twerski, are very, very distinctive. I learned from him that if you can be guided to break your heart in the pattern of the Shofar, to do it in what could be called a controlled experiment, it is much easier than having to hit a rock bottom in your general life. When we hit a brick wall in our lives, we can learn from it or not learn from it, but there is so much wheel spinning involved, that the deliberate broken heart brought about by this pattern of asking forgiveness is a preferable alternative, just as begging for my life because I didn’t eat breakfast before davening is much easier than it would be if God forbid I had a terrible life-threatening illness or some other circumstance that would get me to actually beg for my life. Instead, I can engineer this situation every morning, and do it in a relatively painless way. These processes are what help us move towards that critical thing called ‘objectivity’, or unbiased judgment. If you don’t have good judgment you’re not going to have a good relationship with anyone, in any area of your life.

## The Head that Changes

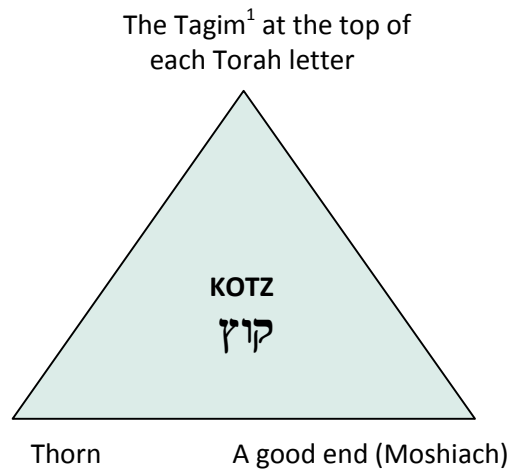


The head that sleeps

The head that learns

Sleeping is a necessary part of growth. The body accumulates strength while it is asleep. Both pleasant things and nightmares are dreamt, building a bridge between the conscious and unconscious minds. This is why sleep is a vital part of Shabbos. The Torah says there is no difference between a sleeping G-d and a sleeping human. If all we did was sleep, we wouldn't move forward. The right side is the conscious side which learns. The ability to learn is the conscious mind learning new things, every minute, every day, every month, every year.

All of these new moments are called **Rosh** – the head, so we will be the “head” and not “the tail.” In Hebrew, these fresh starts are called Rosh Hashanah -- **the head that learns**, Rosh Chodesh, **the head that's new**, and rashit which is Israel, Torah, creation, and the first fruits. The root of the word rashit is **rosh**. All of the above are the source of hope in our battle against Amolak who tries to convince us that we are the hopeless tail and not the head. Thus, we have the custom of eating fish heads on Rosh Hashanah. **The head that changes** is the synthesis of the paradox of the sleeping head and the learning head. **Change** requires both sleep, i.e. no change, and new starts, i.e. **learning**. Without sleep, a person's natural resistance will stop all change. Without learning, a person will be imprisoned by addictions and habits of the past. Therefore, the **teshuvah** of Rosh Hashanah requires both sleep and learning to be effective.



Torah optimism is expressed in the word “קוץ” (“kotz”). The Talmud says, don’t push the end, and don’t depend on a miracle.

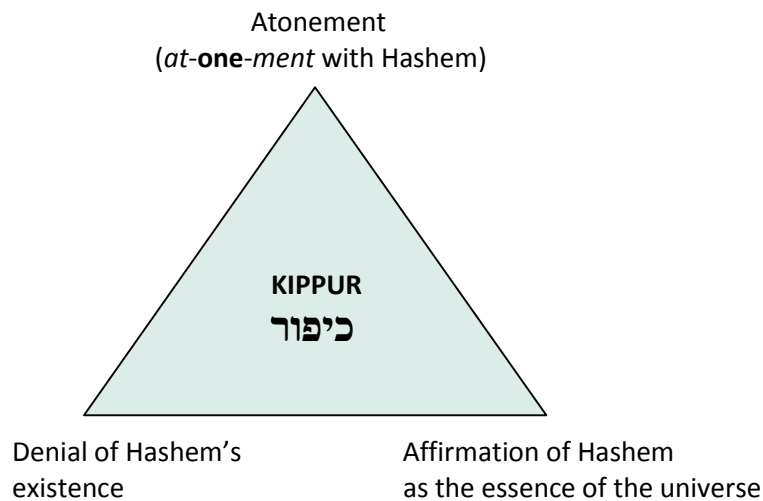
We learn from Tamar how to combine beauty and essence. All the ideas of Messianic redemption are contained in the parshah’s of Vayeshev and Miketz. In Vayeshev, Tamar, instead of accusing Judah, invites a conversation with the words “please recognize this,” when she holds up the collateral he left with her in payment for relations with her. In essence, she lights the first Chanukah candle, which symbolizes hope in a dark world. All the potential knowledge and spiritual innovation of Avraham, Yitzhok, and Yaacov are gone until Tamar resurrects them. She avoids accusations and begins a conversation. Moshiach means conversation and anointed with olive oil.

In parshah Miketz, all the brothers of Joseph are silent because of shame. They can’t even look at each other. Joseph is in prison dreaming of revenge, and Hashem makes it clear to him that hate got him into prison, and love has to get him out. Joseph was a perfectionist who saw all the flaws in his brothers and reported them. He asked G-d after doing the right thing in refusing Potiphar’s wife why he was spending 12 years in the dungeon, while his brother Judah who had relations with his own daughter-in-law, was being rewarded by giving birth to the messianic line. Hashem shows Joseph two dreams as an answer to his question. The butler who let a fly get in Pharaoh’s wine represents Judah, who has tolerance for mistakes made by himself and others. The baker permits a rock to get into Pharaoh’s bread and is executed. This is a sign to Joseph about his perfectionist tendencies. He treats mistakes like a stone in the bread, which is preventable (because the stone is inanimate). He must dream up a drama of deception that can bring forgiveness that can bring conversation back to his family, just as Tamar had done before him. The process of salvation in the Torah requires a person to take responsibility for their own pain (**kotzim – thorns**).

It is imperative that we teach Christians, Moslems, and Jews the Torah meaning of **Messiah**. Conventionally, the Messiah is a man with magical powers who can rescue human beings from themselves and lead us to Paradise. The Torah view is that a Messiah wears the crown of thorns with which he teaches people to patiently take responsibility for their own troubles and not “push the end,” or artificially impose positive expectations on problems, which results in disappointment. Rabbi Akiva teaches a class on the crowns of the letters, which are a crown of thorns on each letter in the Torah. Moses attends Rabbi Akiva’s class and doesn’t understand. The letters represent a synthesis of thorns and the good end, and teach us how to bring redemption to the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Decorative "crowns" which are sometimes placed on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The taga is regularly composed of three flourishes or strokes, each of which resembles a small "zayin" and is called "ziyyun" (זיין זיונים = "armor," or "dagger"). The Maggid of Mezeritch, the successor of the Ba'al Shem Tov, teaches that the verse "A woman of valor is the crown of her husband" alludes to the form of the letter zayin. There are seven letters **צ, ג, ו, נ, ט, ע, ש** that have the crowns on the points of the upper horizontal bars. The flourishes are placed on the tops of the letters, and they are found only in the Scroll of the Law, not in the printed copies of the Torah. The tagin are a part of the Masorah. According to tradition, there existed a manual, known as "Sefer ha-Tagin," of the tagin as they appeared on the twelve stones that Joshua set up in the Jordan, and later erected in Gilgal (Josh. iv. 9, 20). On these stones were inscribed the books of Moshe, with the tagin in the required letters (Nachmanides on Deut. 27. 8). The baraita of "Sefer ha-Tagin" thus relates its history: "It was found by the high priest Eli, who delivered it to the prophet Samuel, from whom it passed to Palti the son of Laish, to Ahithophel, to the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite, to Elijah, to Elisha, to Jehoiada the priest, and to the Prophets, who buried it under the threshold of the Temple. It was removed to Babylon in the time of King Jehoiachin by the prophet Ezekiel. Ezra brought it back to Jerusalem in the time of Cyrus. Then it came into the possession of Menahem, and from him was handed down to R. Nechunya ben ha-Hanah, through whom it went to R. Eleazar ben 'Arak, R. Joshua, R. Akiba, R. Judah, R. Miyasha, R. Nahum ha-Lablar, and Rab."



Besides the above three meanings, Kippur also means "to cover" and "reverse." This word is full of paradoxes, as is the Yom Kippur service.

The denial of Hashem's existence is represented in the "scapegoat service."<sup>1</sup> In the scapegoat service, there are two goats who have lots cast on them. One is sent to the wilderness and one is sent to the Temple. The one sent to the wilderness has a stone tied between its horns and is pushed backwards off a cliff. The goat is then torn apart on its way down the rocky slope. This ceremony breaks every law in the Torah and had a shocking affect on the people who witnessed it. Why? The idea is that if you don't make your dark side conscious by lifting it up to Hashem – symbolized by the goat that goes to the Temple – you inevitably will project your dark side onto another person. Our lives are filled with the shattered fragments of our inadvertent mistakes. Each mistake contains a holy spark of Hashem. We must lift up and join together with the other sparks from all the other fragments. We thus create a flame of Hashem's presence in our consciousness made up of all of our errors. This energizes us to change with joy.

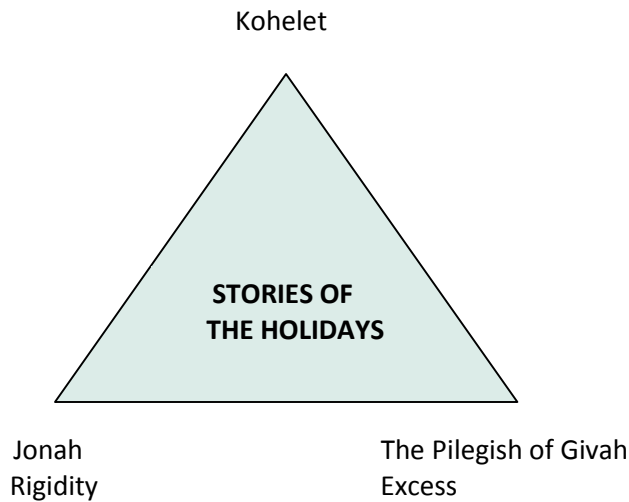
The "Korban" -- the sacrifice -- means to come close -- to draw near to Hashem. When we kill the goat carefully in the Temple according to the Torah's instructions, we are raising the predatory nature of man. This reminds us of the process of lifting something dark, i.e. the predatory nature, back to Hashem. Scapegoating is the most ubiquitous and destructive act that we do. We see many examples as in the Holocaust's destruction of millions. It is the key to lists of inadvertent sins that we confess on Yom Kippur eight times. The liberation of failure is the core of the Yom Kippur service and gives meaning to the above triangle. Only when we can take the dark fragments of our life and see Hashem's light in them can we truly be free.

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<sup>1</sup> From Parsha Acharei Mot (Vayikra 16-18) The Scapegoat - "The goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities..." (Leviticus 16:22)

This Parsha begins with the discussion of one of the most perplexing ceremonies in the Torah; the offering of a "scapegoat" to atone for our sins - the goat that is pushed over the cliff on the Day of Atonement and carries away all the sins of the Jewish people on its back. The Midrash offers the following idea: "This goat [the scapegoat, called sair in Hebrew] refers to Esau, as it is written: "but my brother Esau is a hairy [written as soir in Hebrew] man" (Bereshis 27:11) [The Hebrew words sair, "goat," and soir, "hairy" are spelled identically.] [It is further written]: "The goat will bear upon itself all their inequities (avonotam)." In Hebrew the word avonotam can be split into two words avonot tam, meaning "the inequities of the innocent." This is a reference to Jacob about whom it is written: "Jacob was a wholesome (tam) man" (Genesis 25:27). The word tam in Hebrew means wholesome or innocent. (Bereishis Rabba 65:15). The scapegoat represents Esau, and the Midrash suggests that this explains how it works; the sins committed by Israel are somehow traceable back to Jacob, as we are all his descendants. Jacob's sins can somehow be blamed on Esau, and therefore it makes sense that the goat, which represents Esau, carries away all of Israel's sins





The Pilegish of Givah<sup>1</sup> is a tale of excess that happens when people are not accepting of authority. The story begins at a time when there was no king. The main authority in the world is Hashem's malkut.<sup>2</sup> This story prepares us to accept Hashem's malkut, or kingly royal authority, i.e. *ol malkut shamayim* in preparation for Rosh Hashanah, which is the coronation of Hashem.

The story of the Pilegish of Givah is one of excess eating, sexual desire and violence that demonstrates the worst of human selfishness. One man's narcissistic injury results in the death of thousands. In Jonah, loving-kindness always ends up in inappropriateness if left without boundaries. On the opposite side of gevurah, Jonah demonstrates that discipline without love also leads to inappropriate places. Jonah is a prophet of Hashem to whom it is more important to fulfill his words than it is to have compassion. Jonah is read at the end of Yom Kippur because the discipline of Yom Kippur leads to a danger of excess religious piety that blocks compassion.

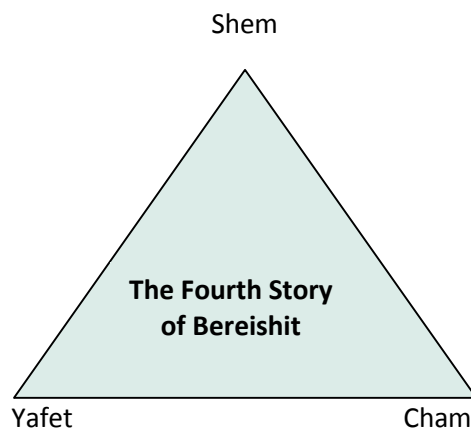
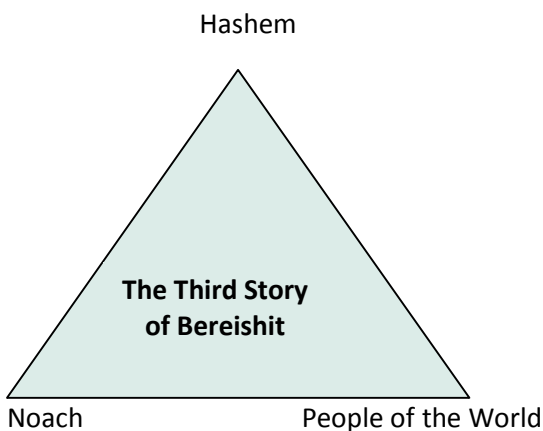
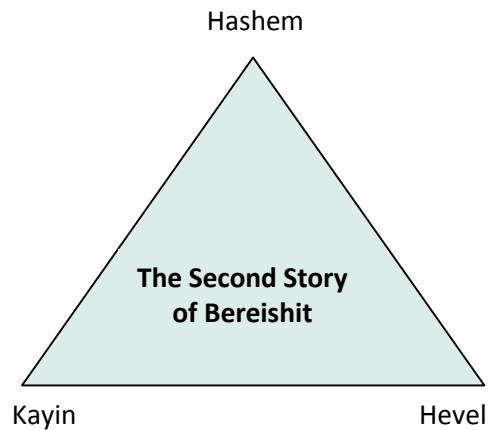
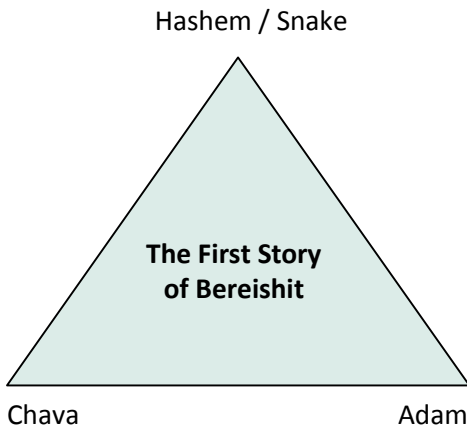
The succah or gourd in the story of Jonah provides the link between Yom Kippur and Succot. On Succot, we read Kohelet, which is the wisdom of King Solomon, who found the balance between love and discipline during his wanderings as a homeless beggar. He had problems of excess with both women and alcohol, and coined the beautiful line in the Song of Songs: "Hashem has the beloved of Israel. He has his left hand – gevurah – under her head, and, with his right hand – chesed – he embraces her." The left hand is Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which emphasize discipline. And the right hand is Succot, which emphasizes love and forgiveness. The challenge of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is self-improvement, which is active. The challenge of Succot is to receive Hashem's love, which is passive.

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<sup>1</sup> Judges 19

<sup>2</sup> Malkuth means Kingdom or Kingly Royal Authority. It is associated with the realm of matter/earth and relates to the physical world, the planets and the solar system. It is important not to think of this sephirah as merely "unspiritual," for even though it is the emanation furthest from the divine source, it is still on the Tree of Life. As the receiving sphere of all the other sephirot above it, Malkuth gives tangible form to the other emanations. It is like the negative node of an electrical circuit. The divine energy comes down and finds its expression in this plane, and our purpose as human beings is to bring that energy back around the circuit again and up the Tree.

## The First Four Stories of Bereishit



**Triangle #1** Triangulated relationships are all a result of the creative process. When they are dichotomized<sup>1</sup>, they produce great dysfunction and entropy. When they are collaborating, they produce life and synergy. God created man and woman as a unity and split them as part of the process of creation, which is called "breaking the vessels." When Adam lied to Chava, the seeds of mistrust and divorce were sown. He told her not to touch the tree, when in fact, Hashem had said not to eat from the tree. And from this came the first mistake of eating of the Tree of Knowledge and the first death and divorce. The problem wasn't the mistake; the problem occurred five minutes after the mistake, when shame, blame and scapegoating produced entropy in the first family.

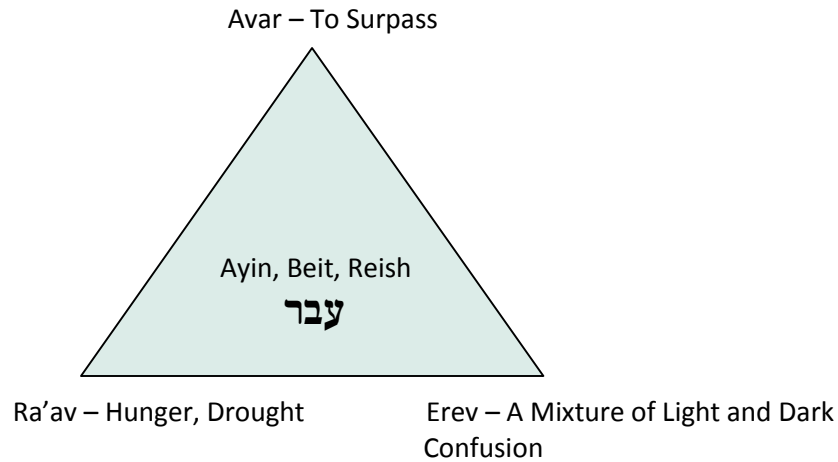
**Triangle #2** Kayin and Hevel learned from their parents that instead of solving a problem, one finds someone to blame. Kayin and Hevel, like Adam and Chava before them, wanted God's approval as the primordial parent. When Kayin did not bring the accepted offering, he could not bear the rejection of it and shame / anger over took him. When he perceived Hashem had rejected him, he blamed it on his brother Hevel. Subsequently, he murdered his brother.

**Triangle #3** Again, the dysfunctional triangulation leads to scapegoating and chaos. Noach tried to teach the people of his generation what was right and what was wrong. Noach was supposed to both teach and defend the people to God. Instead, he criticized and blamed them and thereby doomed them. As a result, the people drowned. Consequently, Noach became very lonely after fighting with his family, and Hashem decided to save the world.

**Triangle #4** Cham, Mr. Heat, castrated and sodomized his father. Yafet – Mr. Beauty – and Shem, Mr. Essence. These are the three sons of Noach. The question is; In this triangle, will beauty be in the tent of heat or the tent of essence?

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<sup>1</sup> di-chot-o-my / Noun A division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.



In the root Ayin, Beit, Reish, Ayin means “eye;” Beit means “duality;” and Reish means “head.” The eye in the head sees two, meaning the eye sees a good G-d and a bad G-d. Avraham taught us how to see only one G-d; that everything is a synthesis of good and bad. Avraham could bless both the good and the bad, seeing Hashem in both. That is monotheism.

When Avraham first arrived in the Promised Land, he saw hunger and drought.<sup>1</sup> There was not a large river to provide water. Avraham was accustomed to water because he grew up on the Euphrates River. So when Avraham got to the Promised Land and saw the drought, he decided to go down to Egypt to the Nile River so he could provide water for his family and students. He became the Evri – the Hebrew – who crossed over the river.<sup>2</sup> He did it to avoid Ra'av. When he got to the Nile, he saw that it was a place of confusion – Erev. There was light and dark in a confusing mixture: water, civilization, comfort and extreme oppression. The leader of Egypt wanted to rape his wife and kill him, and that was the entrance ticket to getting into Egypt – the narrow place of anxiety.

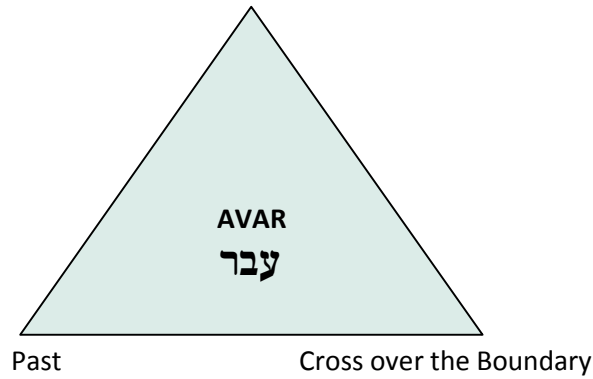
Avraham came to see that the Euphrates was the place of anger (charan). It was the place of Nimrod and Terach (his father), both of whom worshipped the idols of their anger. The Nile was the narrow place of anxiety and constriction (mitzraim). Thus Avraham moved out into the desert to find his spiritual center in a place where people had to beg for water. In this way, he surpassed the limitation of his own personality (Avar). He called this place – Beersheva – the Well of Satisfaction, completing the paradox of having found in a place of scarcity of water, adequacy and satisfaction. And in places of abundance, i.e. Mesopotamia and Egypt, he found anger and anxiety.

Thus the vulnerability of Shabbos, where you can't shop or access the abundance of civilization, becomes the source of “enough,” or the simcha of satisfaction and gratitude. The vulnerability of Jewish history also becomes the source of energy and joy. Shabbos and Jewish history are called the desert of Beersheva. Shabbos and Jewish history invite us to surpass our personality and constraining needs for security and comfort.

<sup>1</sup> Bereshis Parsha Noach and Lech Lecha . . . specifically chapters 11-14

<sup>2</sup> "And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." (Gen 11:31) "And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew ..." (Gen 14:13) Hebrew means "one from beyond" and is derived from Eber meaning "the region beyond" (the Euphrates) The term "Hebrew" is taken to mean "to pass or to cross over." Avraham "crossed over" the River Euphrates to get to the land of Canaan, from Chaldea.

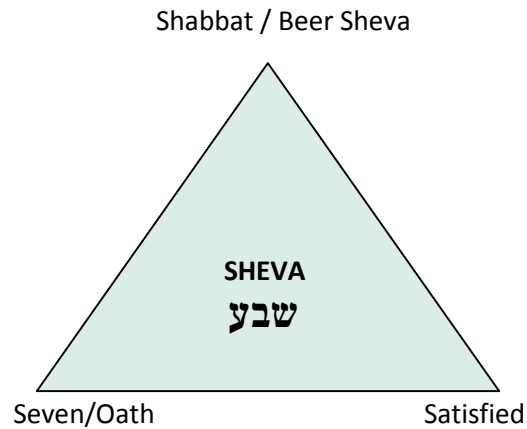
## To Surpass Oneself - Avar



The root of “avar” in its constrictive meaning on the left side means “being trapped in the past.” Avraham leaves the past (the Euphrates) to access the present. In the beginning of Parshat Lech Lecha – go to yourself – the past is defined as one’s father’s influence, mother’s influence, and one’s cultural influence. Avraham has to leave the past and go to the future – the Nile – in order to get to the present, which is Shabbos and the desert. All of which are defined by the same word: avar. **This is our ideal paradox:<sup>1</sup> one has to leave the constraints of past regrets and expectations of the future in order to access the freedom of being fully in the present.** When one reacts spontaneously to the present, one is indeed surpassing oneself.

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<sup>1</sup> A **paradox** is a seemingly true statement or group of statements that lead to a contradiction or a situation which seems to defy logic or intuition.

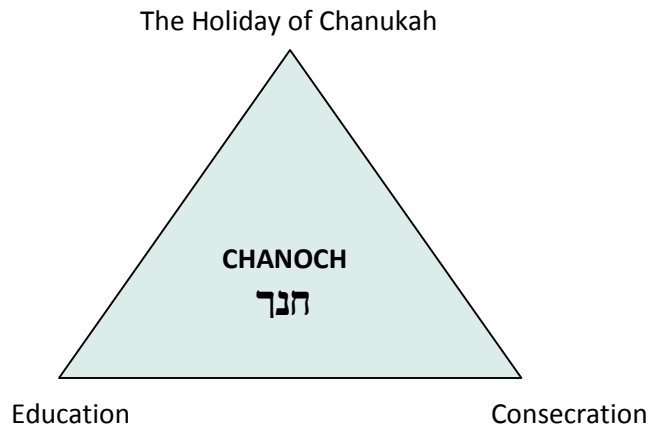


Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob each find their way to Beer Sheva – the well of Seven / Oath.<sup>1</sup> Avraham retreats to the desert after becoming disillusioned with civilization in Egypt and Mesopotamia, as we said in the last triangle. Isaac makes good boundaries with Avi Melech through digging the four wells: Esek, Sitnah, Rechovot, and Beer Sheva. He finds the satisfaction and peace of Shabbat by going inward. Unlike Avraham, Avi Melech comes to Beer Sheva to talk to Yitzhak to make a peace treaty. Yitzhak sets a boundary against intimidation by stronger men. Yaacov has to leave Beer Sheva and go to the Town of Anger (Charan), where he finds satisfaction by setting a boundary between him and his father-in-law, Uncle Lavan (White) who was always manipulating and changing business contracts. His boundary is about business ethics. He makes a pile of stones, (Yagar Seudatha) to demonstrate that he does not share the business ethics of his father-in-law. The business ethics of Lavan remain the biggest threat of the evil inclination to the Jewish people throughout Jewish history. In the Haggadah, it says that Lavan tried to uproot the essence of the Jewish people.

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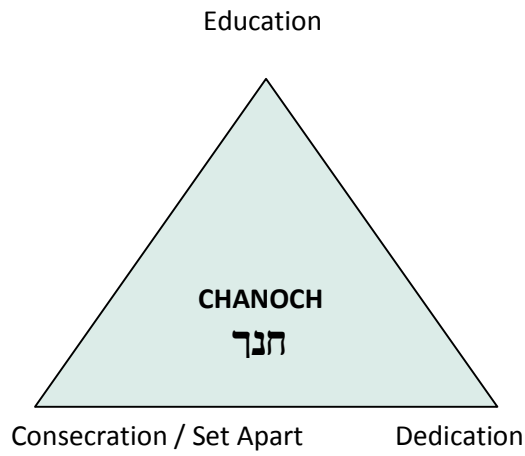
<sup>1</sup> Be'er is the Hebrew word for well; sheva could mean "seven" or "oath" (from the Hebrew word shvu'a). There are several etymologies for the origin of the name "Beer sheva":

- The oath of Avraham and Avi Melech (well of the oath)
- The seven wells dug by Isaac (seven wells)
- The oath of Isaac and Avi Melech (well of the oath)
- The seven ewes that sealed Avraham and Avi Melech's oath (well of the seven).

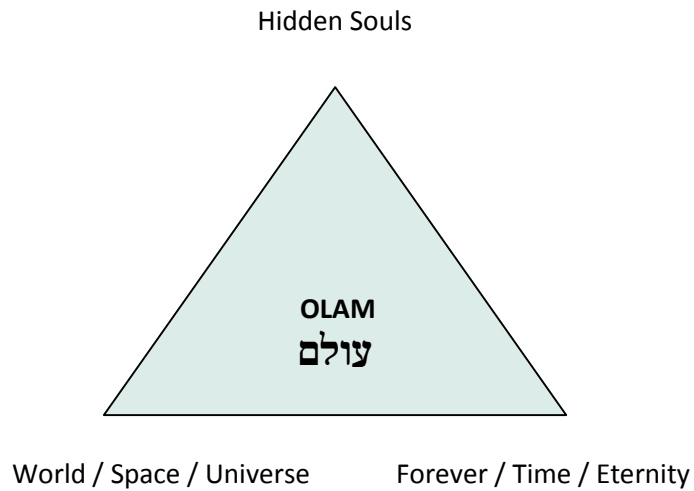


Chanukah is bringing the light of Hashem into the darkest places of one's personality. The places you feel are unredeemable. If you don't you will end up projecting them onto others, i.e. scapegoating. So to bring peace to the world and a good end, we must educate and train ourselves in the mitzvahs of Torah, and do the mitzvot in a holy way.

Consecration means connecting our actions and thoughts to Hashem (kadosh). The Torah says to sanctify that which is permitted to you. For instance, when we eat permitted foods, they are still not consecrated until we acknowledged Hashem by saying a bracha. When we move into a house, it is not consecrated until we bring our prayers and intentions into inviting guests and fixing a mezuzah on the door. This makes our house a special place, and in the house one must also consecrate a place for prayer by making it special, like a small synagogue.



**Chanoch**, my name, was also the name of Chanoch in the Torah, who lived forever. The first meaning of Chanoch is to **consecrate** by setting something apart. The second meaning is to **dedicate** a structure through a ceremony, as in Chanuchat habayat, and Chanukah. The synthesis is **education** by elevating the material world, through mitzvot. The mitzvot educate the soul on how to infuse the body with lightness of being.

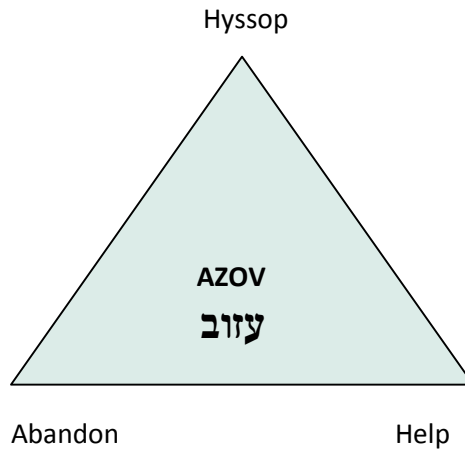


The word Olam<sup>1</sup> exists in five dimensions. In three-dimensional space – olamot -- Olam means “world” In the fourth dimension of time, shanot, Olam means “forever.” And in the fifth dimension of souls – nefashot – Olam means “hidden.”

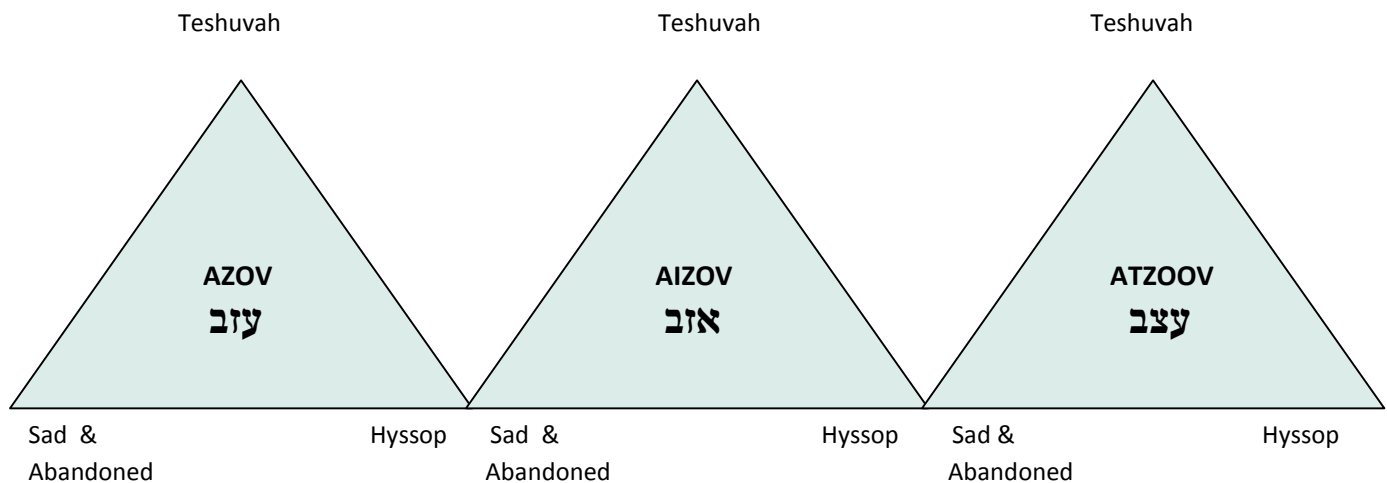
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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word olam means in the far distance. When looking off in the far distance it is difficult to make out any details and what is beyond that horizon cannot be seen. This concept is the olam. The word olam is also used for time for the distant past or the distant future as a time that is difficult to know or perceive. This word is frequently translated as eternity or forever but in the English language it is misunderstood to mean a continual span of time that never ends. In the Hebrew mind it is simply what is at or beyond the horizon, a very distant time. A common phrase is "l'olam va'ed" and is usually translated as "forever and ever" but in the Hebrew it means "to the distant horizon and again" meaning "a very distant time and even further" and is used to express the idea of a very ancient or future time.



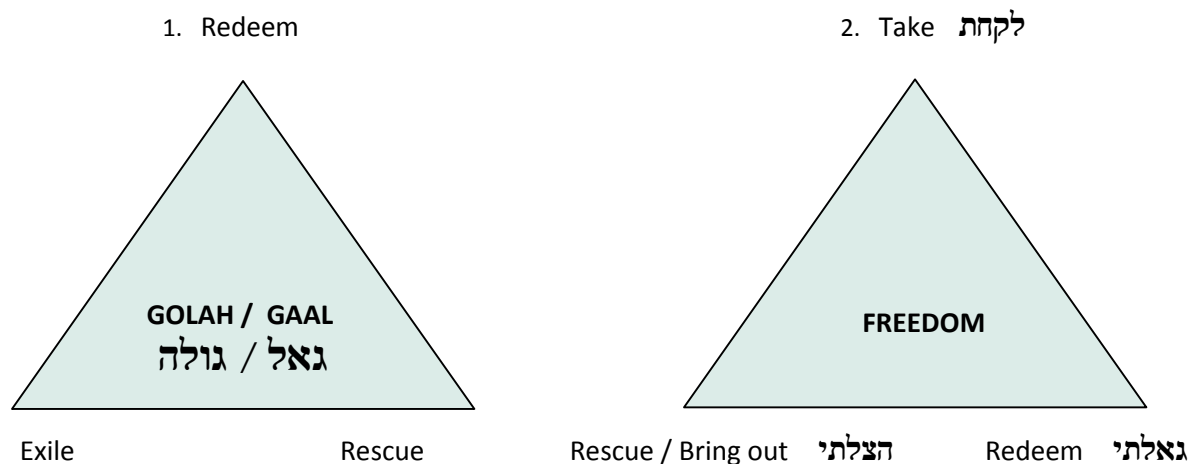


In Parshat Mishpatim (Exodus 21-24) there is a civil law which states that if you see a donkey collapsed under a burden that belongs to a person you hate or who hates you, you must help that person relieve the load of the donkey. The word “azov” appears three times in this law . . . a fact that is very unusual. Repetition always means something additional. In the Torah, in this case, you must abandon your grudge against this person and help him in order to build a bridge of peace with him. The word donkey also means “materialism.” In other words, this person’s materialism is depressing them and weighing them down in their life. You must help this person lift their depression by showing them some positive spiritual light. This law helps us in building peace in the world.

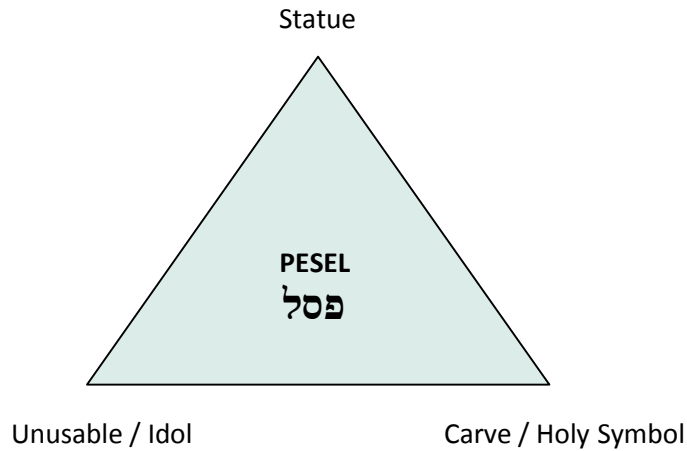


In the disease tzaraas<sup>1</sup> (spiritual leprosy), the person is banished from the camp, alone, and forbidden to talk to anyone else for a week. The righteous woman Miriam (bitter sea), is the only one in the torah who contracts leprosy. Why? Because she is in charge of the cohesion of the community, so when she makes a mistake and gossips to Aharon about Moshe, she is punished. In torah, the more righteous you are and the more you know, the more you are vulnerable to punishment from Hashem. Leprosy is a metaphor for the **teshuvah** process. The first step is admission to and ownership of the problem. People who deny they have the problem cannot do teshuvah. This step is always **painful and sad**. At this stage, the person inevitably feels abandoned by Hashem. After the admission of the deficit, a person feels a surge of joy, and the **hyssop** (symbol of humility) sprinkles living water on the person. This effectuates a change of behavior through joy. With each step of teshuvah, the person becomes bigger and can access successively deeper levels of his personality.

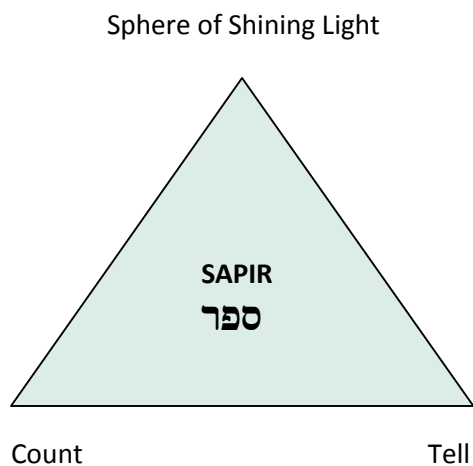
<sup>1</sup> Tzaraas is a disfigurative condition referred to in chapters 13-14 of Vayikra. Tzaraas affects both animate as well as inanimate objects; the Torah discusses tzaraas that afflicts humans, clothing and houses. As there are no terms synonymous with tzaraath in other languages. Some suggest that any connection between tzaraas and **physical** leprosy is altogether erroneous [**spiritual leprosy** is discussed above is much more accurate], because tzaraas affects not only people, but also clothing and houses. The linguistic root of tzaraas means "smiting", in reference to a Talmudic explanation that it serves as a punishment for sin; it is quite possible that tzaraas was a general term for certain types of skin disease, rather than a particular condition, and the Talmud maintains a similar view, arguing that tzaraas referred generally to any disease that produces sores and eruptions on the skin.



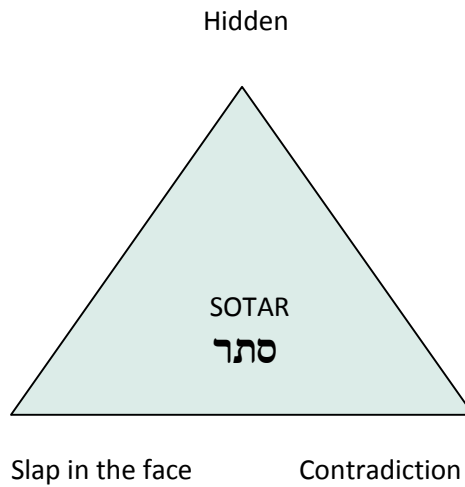
The above triangles break up the concept of freedom into four different facets. The left side of triangle 2 is the idea of freedom from oppression. Examples of this are getting out of jail or getting out of an oppressive country or relationship. The model of this in the Torah is getting out of Egyptian slavery. This is a very superficial kind of freedom. As we say, you can take the Jews out of Egypt, but it is much more difficult to take Egypt out of the Jews. Every victim is oppressed by their own “victimness.” Until a person sees their responsibility in any situation, even they have been abused, the person has no power to improve their situation. Victims are powerless. To complete the process of freedom, the Jews had to experience a year of watching the plagues, then forty more years in the desert . . . finally receiving the Torah at Sinai. Therein, they were able to take responsibility for their situation and see that it wasn’t the Egyptians who were persecuting them. In triangle 1, exile is the first freedom because it provides perspective on your situation, even at the cost of persecution. Avraham went down to Egypt, experienced persecution, and all the Jews followed him, repeating the same process. Disillusionment was also a benefit of exile. All the exiles of Jewish history, the exile in itself is the first step in our freedom. We add an “aleph” to the word exile at the left side of the triangle, creating the word redeem as the synthesis. So we see that redemption and exile creates a paradoxical pair. The aleph stands for Avraham, and Hashem’s oneness as perceived by Avraham. Therefore we see freedom in the Torah as a complicated process in which we redeem the dark parts of ourselves inside our unconscious minds. We have to make the unconscious conscious, and the covert overt by admitting and owning our secrets. If we don’t, we scapegoat through projecting our darkness on others. This is the worst form of slavery. In teshuvah, we turn these dark and weak elements into strengths . . . thereby achieving freedom.



The second commandment orders us not to make idols, or anything in the image of Hashem. Thus we see no images in any synagogue. In the story of the golden calf, the Jewish people worship a statue of a golden calf. The statue, *pesel*, was made by Aharon who threw gold into the fire and the Egyptians who threw into the fire a parchment which said “alay shor” – “rise ox.” When Moshe Rabbinu saw Aharon holding the golden calf – *pesel* – he broke the tablets of the ten commandments that Hashem had made. For teshuvah over the golden calf Moshe carved / *pesel* the two golden cherubs and placed them in the Holy of Holies. Like the golden calf, the cherubs could move. When the Jewish people pleased Hashem, the cherubs were face to face, and when the Jewish people displeased Hashem, the cherubs were back to back. Furthermore, Moshe carved – *pesel*, the second set of tablets of the ten commandments, and brought them down on Yom Kippur. They were a concrete, holy symbol of the tablets that he had broken which represent the broken hearts of the Jewish people. The only complete heart is a broken heart. So we see that the same word has three separate meanings in dynamic tension with each other, which all appear in this paragraph.

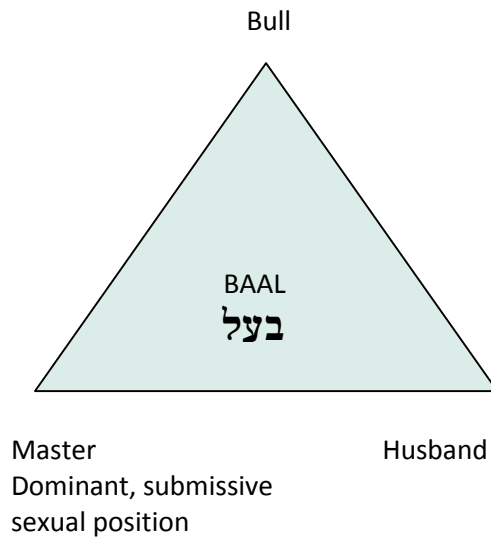


One of the most mystical words in Hebrew – sephirah -- is also the origin of the English words “sapphire” and “sphere.” On the contractive side, it means “to count,” and is applied to counting the omer. The omer is the process of preparing to receive the Torah. It is done between Pesach and Shavuot. This process is a maturing process of self-reflection. One must make each day “count” by evaluating one aspect of the sephirah for each day in a way that transforms the counter. This is done with a bracha. Each day one must then “tell” stories, which is the expansive right side of our triangle. The stories must include those about oneself and about the Torah personality associated with that sephirah for that day. For instance, the first day is chesed shebah chesed. On this day, stories would be told about Avraham’s love and how the story teller encountered experiences of love in his or her own life.



For Purim, Esther's name comes from the line in the Torah where Hashem says, "I will surely **hide** myself." The scroll of Esther is the only book in the Tanach that does not have the name of Hashem anywhere in the book. Yet it was under Esther's leadership that the Jews accepted the written and the oral Torah for the first time, 1,000 years after Sinai.

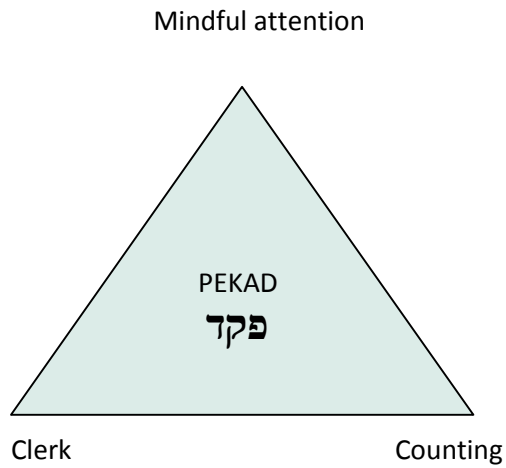
The oral Torah (the Talmud) is based on a process of contradiction. Two Tanaitic statements that contradict each other are presented as the **thesis** and the **antithesis**, and then a **synthesis** is developed from which we derive Jewish law (halachah). People experience abandonment or a **slap in the face** from contradiction because they lack relationships of helpful opposition. Contradiction and paradox are necessary for growth. Therefore, the Torah says that the first question Hashem asks you when you die is whether you surrounded yourself with yes people. Or did you seek out people who would **contradict** you? Before going in to have relations with Ahaserus, Esther quotes King David, "My G-d, my G-d, why have you abandoned me?" The Jews of Shushan also felt abandoned because Haman wanted to annihilate them, and also felt abandoned in the Holocaust.



The lowest and darkest point in the Torah is the incident at **Baal** Peor<sup>1</sup>. The Jewish people worshipped a large statue of a **bull** by throwing excrement at it and having **relations** with non-Jewish women in front of it. This combination of control, aggression, and sexuality leads to a profound degradation of the human spirit. Moshe goes to Baal Peor to find an anonymous burial site for himself. He is a sentinel who guards the Jewish people from these influences forever. By so doing, he is our teacher, and a small part of him is present in each and every Jew.

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<sup>1</sup> The name Baal Peor consists of two parts: Firstly the word Baal meaning owner, husband. The second segment is the name of a mountain in Moab: Peor. This name comes from the Hebrew verb פער meaning open wide. The occurrences of the verb indicate adjunction with strong passion or feeling, usually not very positive (Iyyov 16:10, Isaiah 5:14), and describe the wide opening of the mouth, hence alluding to other body cavities. Hosea remarks on the Baal Peor event in Hosea 9:10, and it is clear that the Israelites defiled themselves there with abundant fornication and sexual perversion.

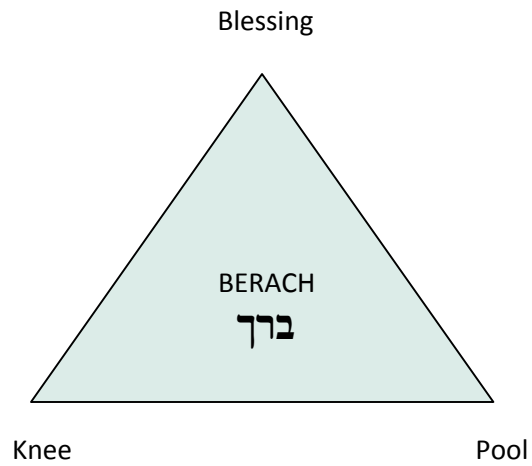


“Pekad Pekadity” are the code words Moses used to announce himself as the Moshiach.<sup>1</sup> They mean mean “to wake up and be **mindful**.” In this case, it meant that Hashem was mindful of the Jewish peoples’ suffering. Serach bat Asher<sup>2</sup> came to Egypt with Jacob in the original group that came down from Israel. She knew these code words, and announced to the people that salvation was near. In other places, **pekad** is used to designate a census – a precise **counting** of the people. In Torah, there are two ways to count: a dangerous counting which turns people into a statistic; and a holy counting – pekad – which makes everyone feel that they **count**. So, counting in its best form means **mindful attention**.

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<sup>1</sup> The Arizal, one of the most important Kabbalists who lived 400 years ago, writes in his book, Sha'ar HaGilgulim (chapter 13), that Moshiach does not die. After Moshiach reveals himself, there is a period of concealment, and then he is revealed again.

<sup>2</sup> Serach bat Asher - The daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob and namesake of one of the 12 Tribes of Israel. Midrashic literature links Serach to the Exodus story and the rest of Jewish history. Serach offers a wonderful female character to incorporate into the Passover story.



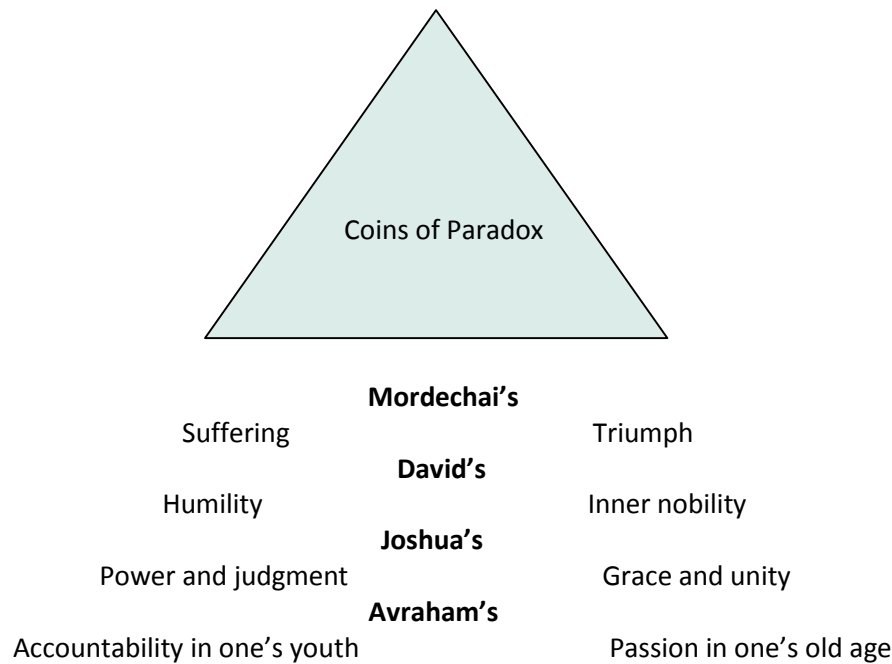
The Midrash about Avraham, “ **blessing**” – berach is stressed in Avraham’s life. It says that before Avraham, Hashem was the only one who could bless people. When Hashem says to Avraham, “those who bless you will be blessed, and those who curse you will be cursed.”<sup>1</sup> Avraham had new power to be a mikvah (**pool**) to the world. Berach also means **knee** that we bend when we say Hashem is the defender of Avraham in the shemoneh esreh.

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<sup>1</sup> Bereishis 12:3



Hashem's presence in the world, on all coins



Avraham, Joshua, King David, and Mordechai minted coins<sup>1</sup> to spread their ideas and the central paradox of their lives. Rabbi Hoffman is also going to mint these same coins to spread the liberating concept of paradox to the world. Mordechai's coin had an image of a crown on one side, and a picture of him sitting in sackcloth and ashes on the other side. This paradoxical image indicates the tension between **suffering** in mourning, and **triumph** and celebration. David's coin had a tower on one side, and on the other, a shepherd's staff. This paradox concerns **inner nobility** and **humility**. Inner nobility is a connected sense of Hashem's presence within one's soul, which gives one infinite value. On one side of Joshua's coin was an ox – symbolizing power and judgment, and the other pictured a unicorn – reem – symbolizing grace and unity. Avraham's coin featured a young couple on one side and an old couple on the other. When he was young, Avraham meditated on a picture of an old couple to remind himself that he had to answer for his impulsive decisions. When he was old, he meditated on the picture of a young couple to remind himself of the **passion** of his youth. This is the elevation of money to symbolic meaning in an attempt to produce a Godly awareness of currency.

The Midrash relates that four biblical personalities, Abraham, Joshua, David and Mordechai, had coins issued in their honor and through these coins each of them gained world renown. The Midrash also describes the designs that appeared on each side of the coins.

#### **Abraham and Sarah:**

The Midrash describes "an elderly man and elderly woman on one side, a boy and girl on the other". The coin symbolizes the miracle of the birth of Isaac to such elderly parents. The front of the coins shows the images of Abraham and Sarah with a tree planted in the ground behind them; the reverse side portrays the images symbolizing the new generation with 18 stars above them; the verse "I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION" is inscribed in Hebrew and English from the upper section of the coin, along the edges.

#### **Joshua:**

In the Midrash, it is told that four leading biblical personalities, Abraham, Joshua, David and Mordechai, had coins issued in their honor and through these coins each of them gained world renown. The word used by the Midrash for "Coin" is the word "Monitin" and, interestingly, this appears to be the root of the words "Money", "Monnaie" and "Moneta" that stem from Latin. In modern Hebrew, the word "Monitin" denotes "good reputation". The Midrash also describes the designs that appeared on each side of the coins. "The firstling of his herd, grandeur is his, and his horns are like the horns of a wild ox..." is the blessing bestowed upon the Tribe of Joseph, by Moses, before his death. Joshua came from

<sup>1</sup> From Midrash Rabbah Bereishis on Lech Lecha 10<sup>1</sup>: Notes 119-128

the Tribe of Ephraim, the son of Joseph. These are the elements on the "Joshua" Coin described by the Mishnah. The ox signifies the strength of Joshua and the horns of the antelope, his majesty and courage. Joshua was the leader who succeeded in his mission despite the hardships and quarrels of the people. In face of the enemy, nevertheless, he remained steadfast, like the "horns of the antelope". These two aspects of his personality are expressed on the two sides of the medal.

#### King David:

The coin dedicated to David is described thus in the Midrash: "Staff and Pack on one side and a Citadel on the other" relating to "the Tower of David". The front side of the coin reflected David's origins – a youth, a "ruddy" shepherd "with fine eyes and good looking", tending his flock. The reverse of the coin shows The Citadel and relates to David the King and the fortress he built in Jerusalem which became the capital of Israel.

#### Mordechai:

The Midrash relates that Mordechai was "Great in the House of the King and renowned in all the lands"...."and for that was his coin. His reputation, sackcloth and ashes on the one hand and a golden crown on the other". According to the Midrash, the coin issued in honor of Mordechai depicts the upturning of circumstances from death decree and mourning to joy and royalty. Mordechai first sits in fast, clothed in sack and ashes, praying and beseeching for the annulment of the harsh decree. Finally, he goes out before the King "in royal attire...and the City of Shushan rejoiced and was glad". The coin publicized the miracle that occurred to the Jews.

**Abraham and Sarah**



**Mordechai**



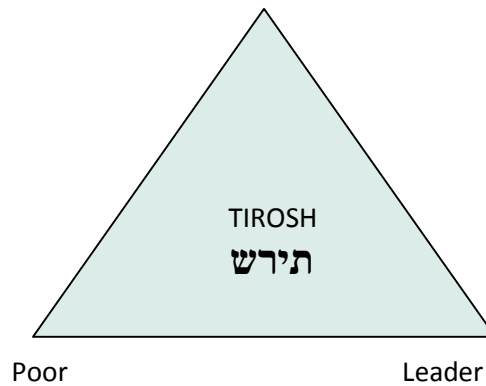
**King David**



**Joshua**



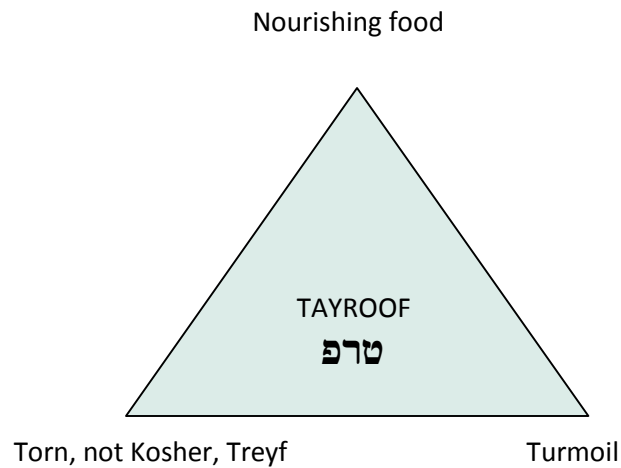
## Human pleasure that gives Hashem pleasure



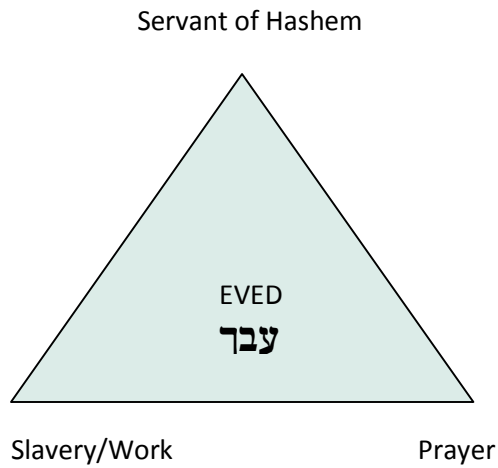
This is a word that means “wine.” Wine is the symbol of all the world’s pleasures. The Torah asks a fundamental question about how Hashem designed humans, and how they deal with pleasure and pain. It is possible to connect both pleasure and pain to Hashem through one’s intuitive powers. When this connection is made – ta’avah, appetite – becomes oneg, a connection of spiritual pleasure or pain. And tirosh means leadership. Moral leaders show us how to enjoy the blessings Hashem has given us in a constructive manner. This is called an upgrade of appetite. If you *degrade* appetite, ta’avah becomes toayvah -- “abomination” and addiction. We know that when leaders degrade their appetites (such as Schwarzenegger and Strauss-Kahn), they cause people to feel hopeless. Wine, tirosh, means poor, in this case of degradation, because the whole world becomes impoverished. In the Torah, we have numerous examples like Noah and Adam who drink wine and cause terrible problems. We also have a mitzvah of making Kiddush which has enabled the Jews to avoid the horror of alcoholism, by teaching our children how to enjoy wine in a constructive way. The synthesis occurs because Hashem – like a good parent “sheps nachas from the kinderlach.” Hashem’s pleasure is contingent on human pleasure.

The main battleground of human choice is what we do with pleasure and what we do with pain. The upgrade of pain is compassion and teshuvah. When we learn from our painful mistakes and make changes, then the very mistakes we made become a source of compassion for others who make or made similar mistakes. The downgrade of pain is bitterness and scapegoating, i.e. if I had a bad day, you will suffer.

The Torah gives us mitzvahs as models of upgrading pain and pleasure. Mitzvahs require a consistency of thought – kavanah; speech – dibur; and action -- maaseh. Each upgrade has a component of the soul which corresponds to it. Action is nefesh; speech is ruach; and thought is neshamah.



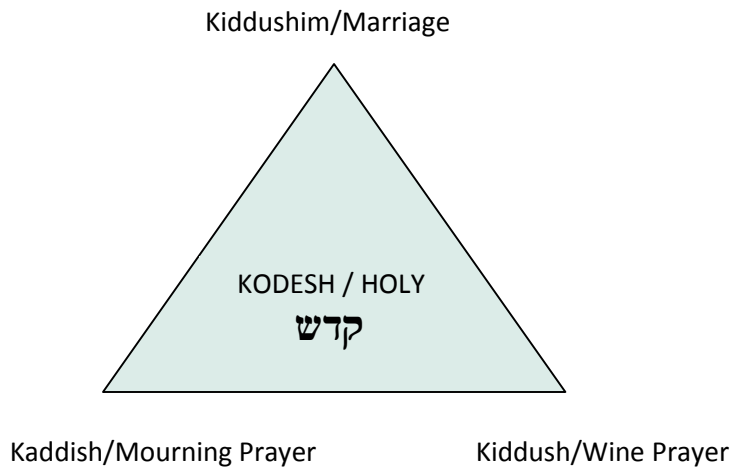
This is a quote from Psalms, 111, verse 5: “Hashem provides teref to those who fear him.” What is the fear of G-d? The fear of G-d is the knowledge that every choice we make has a consequence built into the structure of reality. If one person told me they didn’t want to see the pictures of the tsunami sweeping away a village in Japan. The Torah says we can convert such pictures into the fear of Hashem. Because we know we are hanging by a very thin thread. We live in a world where there is a lot of tearing – treyf – in human relationships. Some tear when they take what they need or say goodbye, and it is selfish and destructive. The fear of G-d provides a context by which people see that the world and all its relationships are very sensitive. You need to be careful when you kill your food, say goodbye, or satisfy your needs in order to make these situations nourishing and supportive. If these things are done without sensitivity, they will lead to turmoil and destruction – tayroof.



The exodus from Egypt<sup>1</sup> for Pesach is from **slavery** to slavery. The question is, is a person going to be a slave to other slave, constantly beholden to the opinions of others, or a slave to Hashem, and thereby free? To prepare for Pesach, we make matzot where we have to continually **work** (knead) the dough with our right hand. If you stop for more than a minute, the dough becomes chometz. The Torah says that this is a metaphor for working those places of pain and discouragement in your personality. If you bury the pain, it sours (chometz) and creates the heat of anger, just as yeast creates heat and a gaseous rising in the dough. When you **work** to clean the chometz with a feather and a candle, anger is reduced in your life. **Prayer** is called the work of the heart. Hashem says there is not enough room for me and an angry person in the same room, thus, as we remove anger, it is replaced by prayer – the work of the heart. Mistrust and scape-goating are replaced by faith and responsibility. The net result is becoming a servant of Hashem, thus free from being over-determined by your own habitual pain and prejudices and the reactions of others .

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<sup>1</sup> Shemot 12 & 13



**Kodesh** means to focus one's attention in a positive or negative way. So all things that are kodesh have an equally balanced creative and destructive potential. **Kodesh** is a key word in the gift of free choice that Hashem has given to each human. Every human is profoundly affected by the environment in which he finds himself. A holy environment brings out a bigger self and an unholy environment brings out degrades a person to an animal self. On the constrictive side, Kodesh is the name of the Mourner's Prayer: **Kaddish**<sup>1</sup>. This is one of the oldest, most widely practiced mitzvahs in the Torah. In death and mourning, there is a razor's edge of choice. If one does not actively grieve the loss of a loved one, there is a heavy price to pay for many years. If one grieves too much, part of them will die with the loved one. This is very dangerous.

With **kiddush**<sup>2</sup> on the right, expansive side, wine is a blessing of intoxication. Jews teach our children the value of wine from birth. Wine is the sanctifying mechanism for all holidays and events. Wine is also a razor's edge of choice. If you drink too much, you can become an alcoholic and destroy your life. Too little, you will miss the gift of intoxication Hashem put in the world for your benefit.

The synthesis is marriage – **Kiddushim**<sup>3</sup>. In a marriage, there is mourning; the day before the wedding, the couple fasts and says Yom Kippur prayers of confession. They acknowledge the death of the old self necessary for the intimacy of a marriage. The center of the marriage ceremony is drinking the wine together. The marriage ceremony also has kinyan – the holy contractual exchange, ketubah. The last component of the wedding is the holiness of intimacy in the yichud room, into which the couple goes, alone, to eat together.

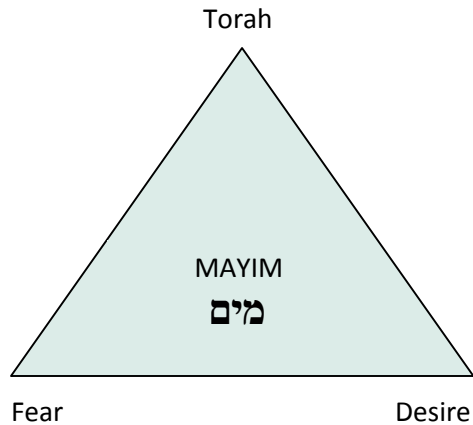
So we see that holiness is making good choices to build good environment which will bring out the best in people.

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<sup>1</sup> The Mourners *Kaddish* is the traditional prayer that is recited after the passing of a loved one. It is recited in the presence of at least ten Jewish men (a *minyan*) over the age of thirteen.

<sup>2</sup> The Sanctification ritual performed on Shabbat and Festivals consisting of liturgical text recited over a full goblet of wine. For example, the Shabbat Kiddush tells how G-d completed creation on the sixth day and then rested; we thank G-d for giving us Shabbat by which to remember creation and the Exodus and for choosing the Jewish people to be an *am segulah*, a special people.

<sup>3</sup> The first part of the traditional wedding service in which the groom acquires the bride by giving her a small token, usually a ring, and declaring that she is betrothed to him according to Mosaic law.



People fear water because they can easily drown in it. The Torah says that sailors pray because ocean storms are so threatening. We see an example as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE in the story of Jonah. *"Then Hashem sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship."* Jonah 1:4-5.

**The Torah makes a clear connection between water and Torah.** Both Joseph and Jeremiah found themselves abandoned in wells that had no water – places where Torah reality and Hashem's purposes were obscured. Jeremiah 38:6 "So they took me (Jeremiah) and let me down by ropes into Prince Malchiah's well, which was in the palace courtyard. **There was no water in the well**, only mud, and I sank down in it." In his perception Jeremiah allowed fear to eclipse his desire.

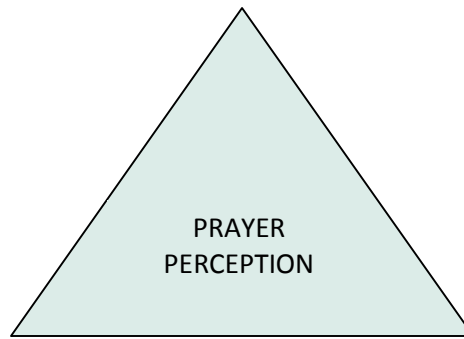
Miriam (MiR YaM – yam is sea) was the Torah "teacher" to bnai Yisrael in the wilderness. In the Talmud we see *"Rabbi Yose bar Yehuda said: The people of Israel had three excellent leaders – Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. Three good gifts were extended to the people of Israel on their behalf – the well, the clouds, and the manna. The well was provided due to the merit of Miriam, the clouds of glory because of Aharon, and the manna on account of Moshe. **When Miriam died, the well disappeared**, [Torah revelation] as it says: "The people of Israel, all of the congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin, and the people dwelt in Kadesh. Miriam died there and there she was buried." Immediately afterwards, the text states: **"The congregation had no water, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon..."** When Aharon died, the clouds of glory disappeared...when Moshe died, all three were gone... (Talmud Bavli, Tractate Ta'anit 9a). Rashi explains "... this mysterious well was a rock from which would issue forth water. It would roll along and accompany the people of Israel (in their wanderings from place to place). It was the very rock that Moshe struck, for it had initially refused to give forth its water on his behalf, since Miriam had died (commentary to above passage from Tractate Ta'anit 9a). Water is comparable to Torah because it flows from a high place to a low place. Hormones are the vehicle of desire in the human brain that circulate through the bloodstream which is mostly water. Sexual desire expresses itself through the release of fluids.*

A person has to make room in his ego (a high place) for Torah learning and Hashem's teachings to flow into him or her. Most ride a constant emotional roller coaster between their fears and their desires. Through Torah, one is able to synthesize the ups and downs of life so there is a balance between fear and desire. Amalek attacks this synthesis through doubt and uncertainty and creates a fear or doubt of "water" (Torah) in one's life.

*"Let me tell you what I try to do. Imagine that you're looking at a candle. What you're really seeing is a lump of wax with a thread down its middle. So when do the thread and wax become a candle? Or, in other words, when do they fulfill the purpose for which they were created? When you put a flame to the thread, then the candle becomes a candle. "The wax is the body, and the wick the soul. Ignite the soul with the fire of Torah and a person will then fulfill the purpose for which he or she was created. And that is what I try to do -- to ignite the soul of our people with the fire of Torah." "My candle," I asked, "has the Rebbe lit it?" "I have given you the match," he said. "Only you can light your candle." - From a conversation between the Lubavitcher Rebbe and Yehudah Avner*

Caleb understands both positions but doesn't know which is correct. He prays his doubts

Some people see occasionally in some things



The spies see no possibility  
of entering the Promised Land of Israel

Joshua sees no possibility  
of turning back in failure

Some people do not see  
Hashem in anything or anywhere

Some people see Hashem  
in everything and everywhere

The spies are sure they are correct. Their thinking is dominated by their fears and they “see” that they are “grasshoppers” in their own eyes, and therefore they are also small in the eyes of everyone who sees them. They rationalize their fear with many good reasons why it’s impossible to go into the Land. Their projective reality is their insecurity. They are completely unable to question that projective reality.

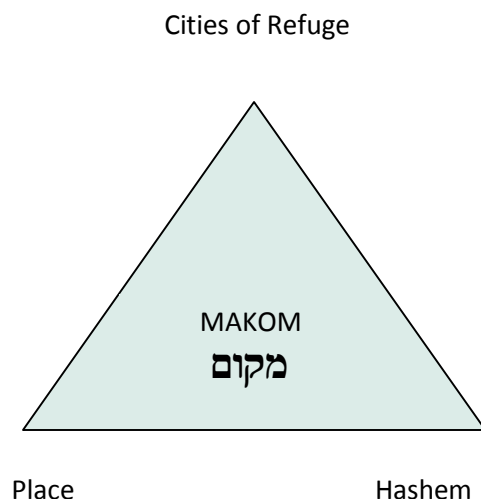
Unless you can accept the challenge and authority of a good teacher like Moses through the Torah, and of Hashem through tests in your life, you are bound to rationalize your projective reality. One must accept feedback from an ezer knegdo – a helpmate against you – so you can question your projective reality. This is why the Torah says make yourself a soul, make yourself a G-d, make yourself a teacher, find yourself a spouse, find yourself a study partner<sup>1</sup> – all of whom can challenge your projective reality by asking you the right questions. These are all people you can trust. The first step, however, is to make yourself a soul voice that can argue internally with the physical voice of your body, your hormones, your thoughts and emotions. Your soul voice gives you the motivation to pray through its questions.

So, therefore, Caleb was the only one who wanted to pray, because internally he had a debate between his soul and his body. His body agreed with the spies, and his soul agreed with Joshua. Thus, we see that prayer is a function of the conflict between body and soul, or between the good inclination and the evil inclination. The soul yearns for unity with Hashem. The body yearns for fulfillment of its appetites. Prayer is the result of the friction between the two. Caleb went up to Hebron and prostrated himself on the grave of Avraham, and begged for help to clarify his confusion. This is the ideal of prayer, which is called heartwork, harmonious with Caleb’s name, which means “like the heart.”

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<sup>1</sup> Pirkei Avos - Ethics of Our Fathers: Chapter 1, Mishna 6      Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Perachya says, "Make for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend, and judge each person favorably."





On the right side is a name of Hashem. We use the name of Hashem – Makom -- in two special places. The first is in comforting the mourner in the shiva house. The second one is in prayer. We say “may the place of the universe comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.” In prayer, the second special place, we say that Avraham instituted the morning prayer with the line from Genesis 19:27 “And (Avraham) arose early in the morning to the **place** where he had stood.” The Maariv evening prayer was instituted by Yaacov in Genesis 24:63: “He (Yaacov) collided with the place and he slept there.” Makom is a non-anthropomorphic name of Hashem that indicates context. On Shabbos, we try to root ourselves in the **place** of the universe by existing rather than creating. Only when we can become part of the **place** can we become partners in the creation of the universe. When we say the ana b’koach prayer, we turn to each of the six directions so we can become part of nature by anchoring ourselves in the **place**.

A person who committed accidental manslaughter has to run away to the city of refuge. The first of these was Cain. He had **no place** because part of his punishment was that the ground shook beneath his feet at all times. The end of the Torah is marked by the city of refuge; the beginning of the Torah is marked by the story of Cain killing Abel. Cain was protected by the mark on his forehead given to him by Hashem. The city of refuge protects the accidental killer where at the end of the Torah the accidental killer would go to be cleansed and purified of the effects of his mistake, committed without his awareness. The city of refuge is a Levitical city because the Levites were doing teshuvah for killing the people in Shechem. Like Cain, the Levites were not permitted to own land in Israel, therefore the cities of refuge were **no place**.

Elul is the city of refuge for everyone, where we are challenged to remember all the mistakes we made unintentionally during the year. At the end of our teshuvah, we go to a Sukkah, which is a **no place** with **no roof** in order to cleanse ourselves of all the inadvertent mistakes we made during the year. Thus, we are in a constant cycle of exile and redemption. We go to **no place** so we can come back and claim our **place** in the world. Jewish history is full of the exiles of the Jewish people. These exiles are meaningful in this context. The Jews are called Wandering Jews who have **no place**. Our homeland Israel is a **place** that we cannot own. All these exiles have the purpose of cleansing Jews and the world of all the mistakes that have been made. Miriam teaches us how to make a mistake and then go into exile and cleanses ourselves from that mistake. Moshe reinforces that when he goes alone to Baal Peor after hitting the rock. When we learn from Miriam and Moshe, we learn how to maximize our teshuvah during the coming days of Elul and Tishrei.

Each woman on Tu B'Av told her chosen man to lift his eyes and see the beauty of her soul.



Lot raised his eyes and saw Sodom

Avraham raised his eyes and saw  
Mt. Moriah with a ram caught in the thicket

“Raise your eyes” is a description of what people see in the world when they look around. Avraham saw a world that wasn't his, that belonged to Hashem. He was always looking for Har Hamoriah – the place G-d would show him. He worked hard on not superimposing his ego onto what he was seeing. So he got credit for every step he took, because his direction was not pre-planned. When he saw the ram caught in the complications of his life, he blew the ramshorn and killed the ram instead of his son, even though that was not his pre-set goal. His pre-set goal was to kill his son. Only when he raised his eyes and saw the alternative solution G-d was showing him did he make the correct choice. He is a model for all of us to challenge our projective realities and see the objective world that Hashem is showing us. Avraham is open to a world of which he has not yet conceived. Hashem is a helpmate against him who presents ten tests to him which challenge all his perceptions.

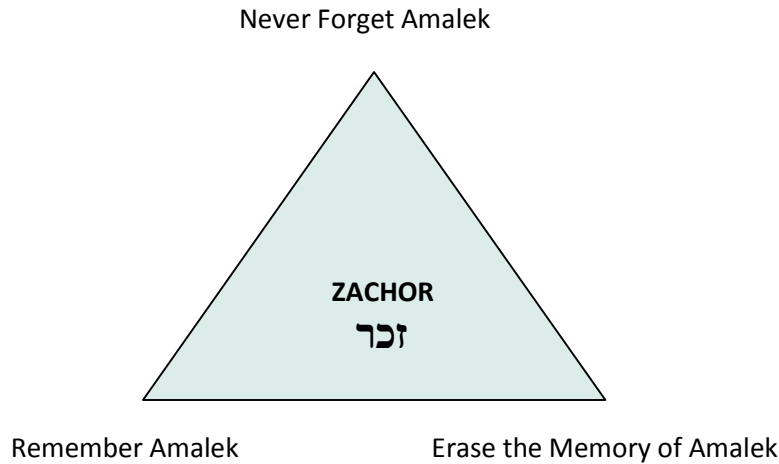
Lot, on the other hand, was the first survivor. His father was burned in an oven. Lot wanted first and foremost to fulfill his desires and not die a martyr to holiness like his father. When he looked up, he saw Sodom, which reminded him of the “Garden of Eden” and “Egypt.” According to the Midrash, he became sexually aroused. He called this vision paradise. Paradise to Lot was the rationalization of everything he desired. Objectively, Sodom was a sterile place where nothing has grown, even until today. Paradise is a projective place where it's okay to get exactly what you want. Lot was superimposing his desires onto his definition of Paradise. In the end, Lot offers his virgin daughters to the mob to be raped and has sex with his daughters in a cave while he's drunk. He replicates the process of Noach who also got drunk trying to find his Paradise. Noach wanted to find a paradise in his own image, ending in disaster.

On Tu B'Av, we read the shocking story of the Pilegish of Givah. The Pilegish (concubine) is a description of the Madonna and whore complex by which a man desires one wife for sex and one wife to raise his children. The Torah thus describes a fundamental schizophrenia of the male mind. The husband of the Pilegish manipulates the whole community into a genocidal war by cutting his Pilegish into twelve pieces.” Manipulation is the opposite of spirituality\*” When people raised their eyes to see what had happened, they stopped the genocide in horror. They then instituted “Tikkun Chava.” Instead of the usual protocol, the women of the tribe of Benjamin chose their husbands. The poor women and the rich women exchanged dresses so that clothing (beged means clothing and treachery) should not be a masquerade of deception. They then danced in circles of forgiveness symbolizing human being's ability to not ferment in hurt feelings (nachem=relenting on grudges). Each type of woman addressed her chosen man with a different phrase. The beautiful woman said, “young man, raise your eyes and see my beauty.” The women from good families said “young man, raise your eyes and look at my family. A woman is for raising a family.” The ugly women said “young man, raise your eyes and choose me as a wife for the name of Heaven.” Each phrase is a different aspect of the Tikkun (repair) of how men view women. This repair is necessary as the foundation of bringing the Moshiach. In men's perceptions, there is a tension between desire and spirituality. Unification of these two in a Jewish “home” is the core of the Jewish mission in the world; to synthesize desire and spirituality in a healthy way is the goal of Torah.



This paradox comes from the Aish Kodesh from his book “Sacred Fire.” The Aish Kodesh is describing how he avoided becoming terrified in the Warsaw ghetto. He did so by finding HaShem’s presence in the evil, terrible things that were happening. He uses a mashal (metaphor) of the snake as a destroyer **and** as a helper. He says, when the snake bites, it’s only because heaven **whispers** in his ear to do so. Other predators (like lions and eagles) kill for food. The snake bites without any practical reason to bite. This proves the snake is an agent of HaShem. The Nazis attack the Jews for no reason, and to their own detriment. The persecution of the Jews took precedence over saving a million Nazi troops in Stalingrad. Thus, their gratuitous evil was a sure sign that “heaven whispered in their ear,” because their actions were beyond reason and practical concerns.

The Torah captures this idea in the word “lachash,” which means both **venom** and **whisper**. Chanah developed the Amidah prayer. In the Gemorah Taanit, she called it “the whisper that charms the snake.” This is why we whisper the Amidah prayer. The snake is our desires, and in the Amidah, we clarify the difference between our needs and our desires. This is how we focus our will on what we need, rather than what we want. When humans rationalize their desires, they become cruel predators.

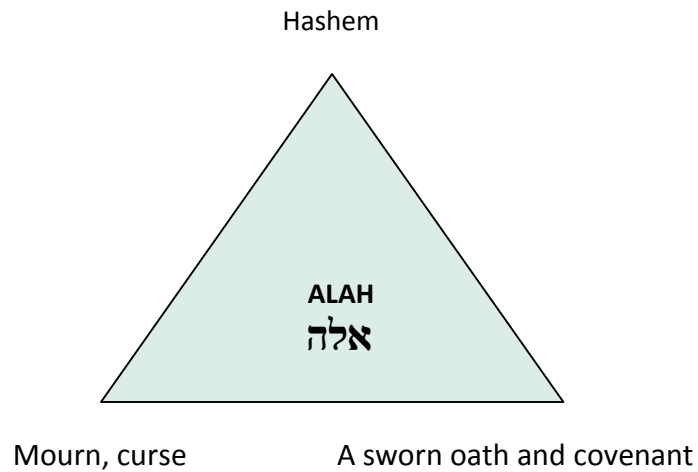


Amalek is that voice of competition, skepticism, cynicism, and hopelessness that keeps us from changing in a positive way. During the Hebrew month of Elul, we are trying to improve our relationships by blowing the shofar every day and becoming bigger people. The narrow end of the shofar is called Mitzrayim, Egypt, or the narrow place of anxiety. Anxiety keeps us stuck.

The wide end of the shofar is called The Land of Israel – a land with a “broad” viewpoint. The narrow end is our smaller self and the bigger end is our bigger self that we are trying to birth during the time of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Defeating Amalek is crucial to making the transition from the narrow place to the broad place. Summer is the narrow place because of its physicality; the light of the summer sun hides G-d. Winter is the broad place; the darkness of the winter sun reveals G-d, because the physical world is forbidding, cold, and dark, and the spiritual world is attractive and luminescent.

The strategy of combating Amalek:

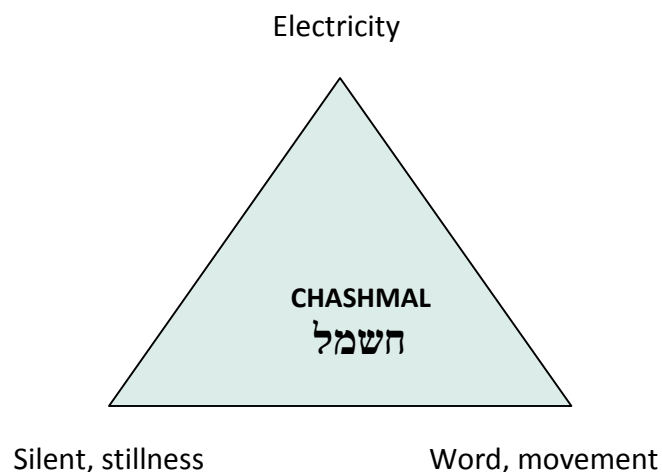
1. Remember – (the left side of the triangle) - Remember what Amalek did to you when you were leaving the narrow place – Egypt. People often repress memories of discouragement into the unconscious mind, especially those from when they were very young. Until people remember and feel what happened to them, they can't work on themselves. Discouragement comes back to them repeatedly. Only by remembering and seeing clearly what their patterns of discouragement are, and finding comfort, can a person start to outgrow the despair.
2. The right side of the triangle: after remembering, one can let go and erase the memory of Amalek. In Elul, we encourage people to engage in the process of letting go of hurt feelings. This is called “erasing the memory of Amalek,” or relenting on the process of holding grudges. Many know they have a problem but can't move on from it. The Torah says this step can only be carried out with great simcha and shalom : joy and peace. They allow you to let go, whereas anything more negative will keep you stuck. Thus, in Elul, we encourage everyone to forgive others, without being asked.
3. The synthesis – the middle of the triangle – **is never forget Amalek**. The voice of despair and hopelessness will always come back, usually stimulated by similar events. One must always be on the lookout for the return of these demons. In step three, one practices speaking to these demons when they return, or else one will regress.



One of the most powerful ways we can affect reality through our minds is through our commitments. When a promise is broken, mourning ensues, and a curse falls on the person who broke the commitment. A good example of a broken commitment that break hearts and causes mourning is in a broken marriage. Our relationship with Hashem is expressed as a marriage that often suffers breakdowns. All of our commitments are part of our fundamental relationship and “marriage” to Hashem.

Moshe implicated all the future generations of Jews in this contract of marriage to Hashem. A marriage is a contract with reality, as it is an agreement of what the exclusive relationship will mean to two people. Every commitment is about two parties agreeing to limit themselves in some way.

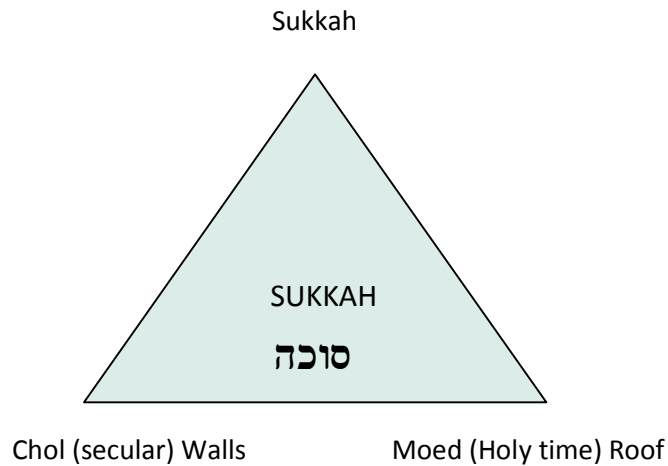
We have rituals which speak to this issue during the Days of Awe – the beginning of the New Year: hatarat nedarim, and kol nidre. In hatarat nedarim, the individual goes before the court and cancels all commitments for the past and for the coming year. In Kol Nidre, the group does the same thing. These are two of the holiest, most awesome, and least understood rituals of the Jewish people. Why do these rituals seem to be undermining our commitments rather than supporting them? It appears that one is being freed from all promises and obligations. By freeing the individual from the sin of oaths, we are emphasizing how important these promises and commitments actually are. This is another paradox illustrating how paradoxical thinking is fundamental to Torah thought. These rituals are simply designed to avoid the curse that comes from the sin of breaking promises. If we break hearts, the consequence of the broken heart and the associated mourning is a curse that comes on us due to the rule of the Torah that there is a measure-for-measure consequence for all of our actions. Conscientious people feel guilty when they break a promise. This is an undesirable result because we wish to free them from the mourning that interferes with teshuvah which leads to behavior change. Behavior change can only be done with simcha – great joy. We put so much pressure on people during the Days of Awe through multiple confessions of wrongdoing, that these ceremonies release the pressure, which is vital to the teshuvah process.



Chashmal is part of the chariot vision of Ezekiel. The Book of Ezekiel was going to be thrown out into the Geniza (a place where old, used documents with the name of G-d are thrown away). The wise rabbis of the Sanhedrin worked very hard to make sure the Book of Ezekiel was included in the redaction of the Tanakh, overcoming strenuous objections claiming that the Book revealed too many secrets and too many contradictions to the Chumash.

Chashmal is the center of the mystical vision of electrified wheels seen by Ezekiel, which were a metaphor for Hashem's power. He saw a chariot with an ox – the king of domesticated animals; a lion – the king of wild animals; the eagle, the king of birds; and man – Yaacov – king of all creation.

These four images symbolized all the power in the universe. Chashmal was a metaphor for the vision of Elijah, the prophet. G-d told Elijah, 1 Kings, 19:12, "Hashem is not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire. Hashem is in the silent, thin voice." Thus we have the paradox of contraction – the words **silent** and **stillness** on the left. Like many others Elijah perceived Hashem's voice as powerful and loud, in sounds. Hashem shows Elijah and Ezekiel in the deep silence and stillness where one can listen to a voice beyond power and mind. Only with silence and stillness is Shma – deep listening -- possible. **Electricity** is silent and it moves, forming speech through objects like microphones. It is silent witness to G-d's invisible power in the world. On the right, expansive side, Hashem's presence can be perceived through the words of prayer and study of the Torah, and the sway of the wind in the trees, and all the other dynamic ways in which life moves on earth. The paradox of the two words contains both the finite and the infinite of G-d's presence.

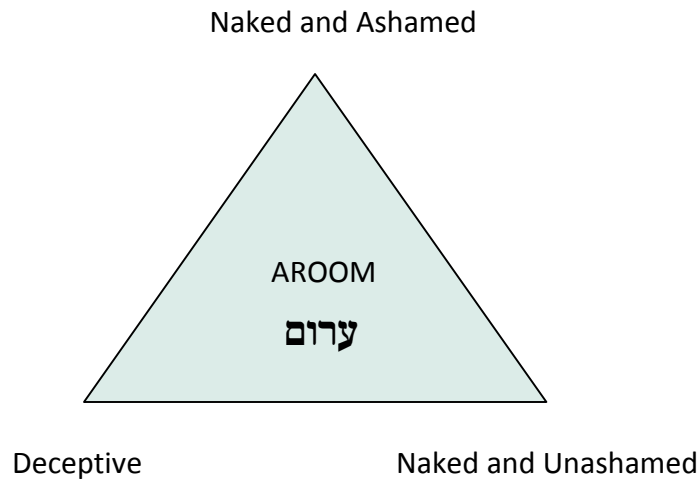


The numerical value of sukkah is 91. Two of the names of Hashem are the different parts of the sukkah. The **roof** is associated with יְקוּק This name of Hashem, which we don't write or speak, represents the verb "to be" in the present tense. This is associated with the schach on the roof of the sukkah because it is infinite, without boundaries. It's Hashem's infinite compassionate light that shines on us through the roof of the succah. The roof cannot be made out of anything useful to humans. The numerical value of this name of Hashem is 26.

The name of Hashem associated with the walls is אֲדֹנִי which means "my master." The **walls** of the succah symbolize all the boundaries which the Torah guides us to put into the world. The walls are made of all materials that are useful to people. The numerical value of this name is 65. When you add the walls (65) to the roof (26), the result is succah (91). The walls are associated with the word secular on the left side of the triangle, because they are made of materials used every day. The roof is associated with the word "**moed**" – everything **holy**. It is expansive, and represents everything beyond the limitations of this world. The walls and the roof are hollow.

The succah is the synthesis of man's limitations and Hashem's infinite compassion. The structure is modeled after a mother's embrace of a child. This reminds us that our only protection in the face of vulnerability is faith in Hashem. The holes in the roof symbolize all the holes in Jewish history in which we had to leave our homes and our countries of origin. The sukkah atones for any decree of exile issued during Yom Kippur. If we are willing to interrupt our routines and face the inconvenience of sitting in the succah, rain or shine, Hashem annuls the decree of exile.

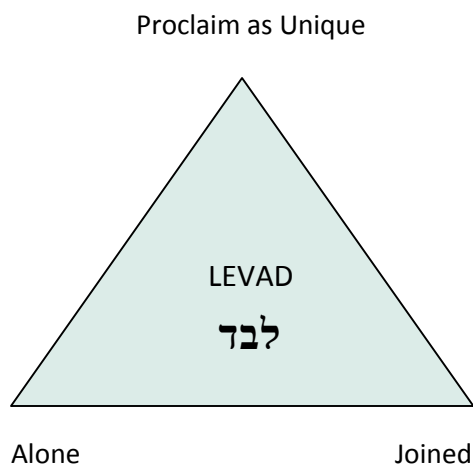




Adam and Eve were created in the Garden of Eden with clothes of light **בגד אור**. The Midrash says that their clothing was called cashmal – electricity. Each person had an aura of light that protected them and created a positive spiritual environment around. Adam and Chavah were **naked and unashamed**, and spiritually innocent. After they ate from the tree of Knowledge, spiritual light could no longer nurture them.

The snake seduced Chavah into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The snake was the most **deceptive** – **aroom** -- “animal of the field.” The snake represents the force of deception that will take advantage of innocence and exploit it for evil purposes. Knowledge can create or destroy worlds. Knowledge can lead to intimacy, as in “Adam knew his wife Eve.” Knowledge can also lead to destruction, as in the atom bomb and many other by-products of human knowledge. Chavah had relations with the snake, which created dark places inside of her, with no light. In the end, Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden, and Hashem sewed for them clothing of leather – **בגד עור**. The numerical value of the difference between the clothing of light and the clothing of leather is 69 – also the numerical value of suffering -- **Yagon יגון**

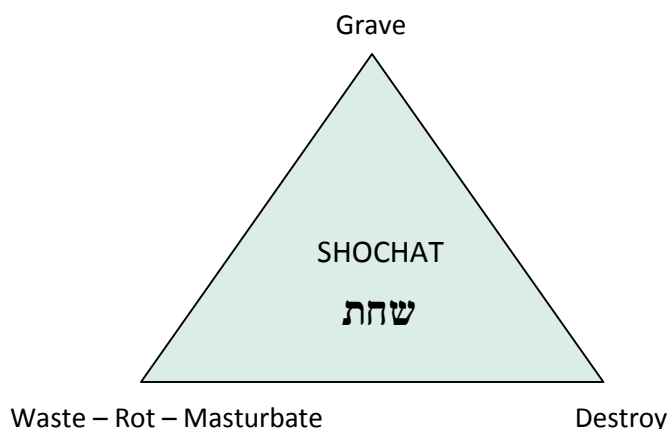




Hashem says, “It’s not good that humans be alone. I will make him a helper against him. The man said, ‘This time, it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called Woman. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.’ ” This appears to be a contradiction – to have a helper against him. Why was man created alone if his ideal state is **joined** to a woman? The world was created in a state of entropy. “There was darkness on the face of the deep.” All natural systems tend towards entropy. Humans have to use free choice in order to build synergies. The highest level of synergy is husband and wife, who collaborate to create a house of “trust.” In turn, the families will collaborate with each other to create community. Community redeems mankind and redeems the natural entropy of the world.

This process can only be achieved through “differentiation.” Humans are born self-centered, only interested in meeting their own needs. Each person must wrestle with their yetzer hara to prevent their desires from becoming addictions. Through addictions to consumption, humans have the power to destroy the earth. Through their souls, humans have the power to create amazing things. Differentiation depends on people’s ability to hear opinions which oppose their own, and make creative use of conflict.

In a good marriage, there needs to be both support and opposition. If the husband and wife are too similar, there is only fusion, and creative synergy is missing in the relationship. Only when a person can proclaim uniqueness can there be differentiation. Differentiation, therefore, is the synthesis between the loneliness of creation and the joining with his oppositional helpmate. It’s as if Hashem created man to alleviate His loneliness. Relationship is the driving force of the universe. Hashem also wants a helpful opposition with his human partners. Hashem’s opposition is expressed through problems and difficulties that arise in a person’s life. When a person can find Hashem in those difficulties and in the suffering, then there is an intimate relationship with G-d; Torah faith is not just finding Hashem in positive events. When Hashem, man, and woman all proclaim their **uniqueness**, the world is redeemed from its darkness. Therefore, there are three partners in the creation of a relationship: Hashem, the mother, and the father. Sh’ma – deep listening – is the appreciation of the **uniqueness** of “the other.” Torah study teaches a process of seeing and being seen by others so a person can fully develop their potential which is all part of **proclaiming one’s uniqueness**.



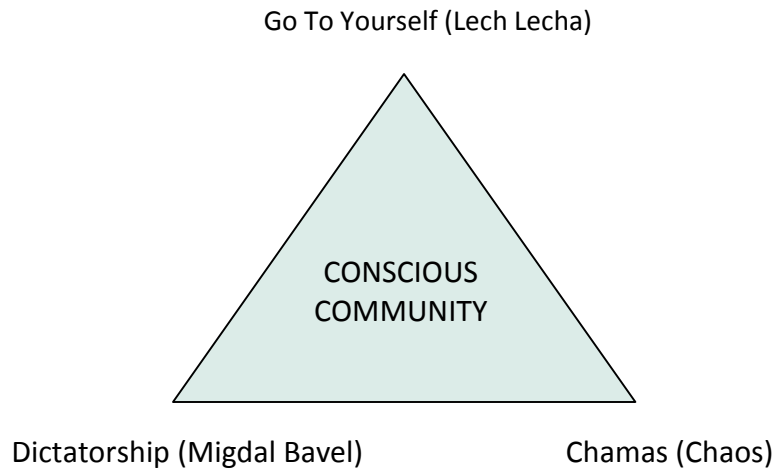
In the Flood, Hashem **שחת** (shochat) destroyed the world because humans were rotten. Shochat is both the punishment and the crime. Humans were engaging in jealous violence – *chamas* – and crossing sexual boundaries, which wasted human potential. After Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, they both spent 120 years masturbating with the snake and Lilith - their fantasies. In all the places of Jewish exile are Jews following the path of Adam's masturbation in which the holy sparks were scattered all over the earth.

Our job is to collect these holy sparks of potential and “*unrot*” them by unifying them. This is a mission statement for the Jewish people: As we said in the triangle on Loneliness, our task is to create synergies against the inertia of entropy in the world. In Hebrew, entropy is described by these words: *tumah*, *shochat*, and *movet*. Synergy is described by *tahara* and *briah*. Shochat is a depressed state of mind in which an individual is not fulfilling their potential.

After Yom Kippur, we enter the bitter month of Mar Cheshvan. We are supposed to do an accounting of our Yom Kippur resolutions this month to assess whether or not we have changed. To help us, the Torah highlights four stories of waste and destruction:

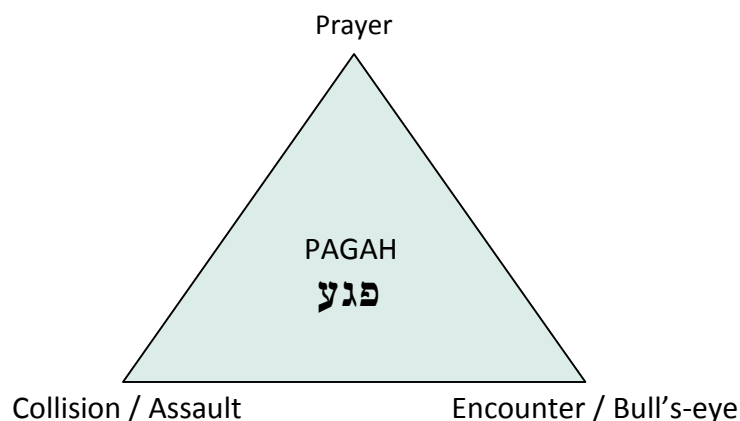
- 1) Adam and Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge.
- 2) Cain killing Abel.
- 3) Noah in the flood ending in his son and grandson sodomizing and castrating him.
- 4) The tower of Babel.

These four stories correspond to the four worlds of consciousness: *assiyah*, *yetzira*, *briah*, and *atzilut*. These stories illustrate all the waste, degeneration and death in the human experience. They help us mark the dead ends in human existence, giving us warnings of places to avoid in our lives and facilitate *teschuvah* transformation. These are dead ends in a maze between us and Hashem. A person cannot know Hashem without knowing himself. Only through *teschuvah* can we fulfill our potential. Every Tisha b'Av in the forty years of wandering the Sinai desert after the Exodus, as a consciousness-raising exercise, each Jew dug his own grave (*shochat*- **שחת**) and laid in it -- to make us conscious of these ends. Joseph was also put into a hole (a grave- **שחת**) which symbolized the death of the potential of Jacob's family.



Before the Flood, there was chaotic entropy in human relationships, jealous violence -- **chamas** -- and transgression of sexual boundaries dominated human interaction. Noach was the key figure of the flood holocaust. His lack of differentiation from G-d and man was symbolized by his name – Mr. Comfort. He walked with G-d, reacting to the evil of the people by running away and trying to form a world in his own image. The undifferentiated person always wishes the people who disagree with him would disappear. Noach saw Paradise in his own image. After the Flood, human relationships made a pendulum swing. At the tower of Babel, people were unified and spoke one language. The unity was under the direction of Nimrod, a cruel dictator at **Migdal Bavel**. Both the chaos before the Flood and the unity after the Flood destroyed creativity and individuality. Today the world still swings between these two extremes of anarchy and dictatorship.

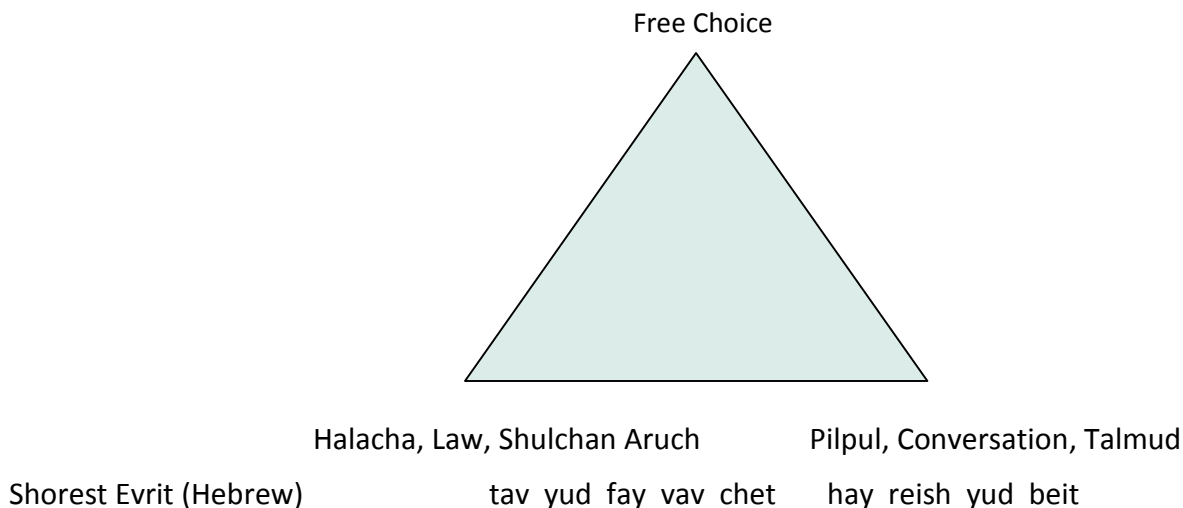
Avraham learned from Noach about the mistakes made, and was the pioneer of differentiation. He was the Ivri, rebelling against the dictators of his time: Nimrod, Pharoah, and Avi Melech. He also rebelled against his father Terach and his Mesopotamian culture. The Ivri is someone who leaves their context and journeys towards consciousness, synthesizing the chaos of everyone being only for themselves – **chamas** – and the order and unity of authority – **Migdal Bavel**. The Ivri takes the middle road that maximizes creativity and potential in becoming a **conscious human being**. The Ivri also surpasses his own personality. This means he is aware of his own projective world that limits his perceptions. A Jew is an Ivri – a Hebrew – who goes into himself, and through consciousness discovers his own originality and potential. Judaism is an island culture that has existed throughout history through this process of differentiation – **lech lecha**. The Hebrew Ivri is both lonely and collaborative.



Yaacov is making a journey from Beersheva (the well of satisfaction) back to Charan (the town of anger) when he **collides** with Mt. Moriah – the place where the akeida was done with his father Yitzhak. He laid down in the same place where his grandfather Avraham put a knife on the throat of his father when his father was leaving home. Leaving home in the Torah is a major event, as it is in all of our lives. In that place, Yaacov has a dream of angels ascending and coming down on a ladder. Angels are conduits of spiritual energy. Some angels are more human, like the ones that visited Avraham and some are more fleeting, like the chayot and the ofanim. Some of them exist for long periods of time and some for just moments. They are stepped-down transformers of Hashem's infinite energy. Sometimes angels are seen by some people and not by others. Bilam the prophet's donkey sees an angel that Bilam doesn't see. During prayers, some people see and feel angels and others feel and see nothing.

Yaacov feels an intense spiritual energy on Mt. Moriah. He has a critical encounter with Hashem, during which he promises Hashem 10% of his earnings if Hashem will protect him. This is the precedent of the tithing we still do today. This prayer **encounter** evolves from Yaacov's poverty, which was the result of being robbed of all his money.

Pagah (פגע) is in the second sentence from both the beginning and the end of the parsha. In the end, Yaacov again encounters angels – the spiritual energy of the land of Israel. There are different angels for the land of Israel and there are different angels for all the other countries. I experience the angels of Israel when I am not jet-lagged and have a great deal of energy on arrival there. On the other hand, when I leave Israel, I experience a lot of jet lag and exhaustion because the spiritual angels have left me. In Yaacov's dream, the angels leave him when he leaves Israel, and he feels bereft. He has also been robbed of all of his money. This is a great opportunity for Yaacov to do teshuvah and work on himself, so that when the angels come down the ladder, there is more room for angels to come in. Sometimes when one collides with angels, it feels like an **assault**, and sometimes it feels like an intimate **encounter**. Both are components of prayer. On Friday night, we greet the angels in the song Shalom Aleichem, asking them to come in and bless us and then we ask the angels to leave. The angels blessing us are the angels of Shabbos while the angels leaving are the angels of the week. In the movie *Praying with Lior*, Lior who is a Down's Syndrome child teaches the adults how to pray. In spite of his disability, he has a concrete experience of the angels of prayer.



The Talmud is called the Oral Torah. Difficult subjects are broached and discussed and many different opinions are expressed. Often a provocative idea will be put forth to stimulate conversation. Tangents are often followed. The Talmud cannot be studied alone. It has to be studied with study partners who have developed the art of asking good questions and listening carefully. The discussion often begins with a legal question, but it never ends with a legal decision. The object of the Talmud is to teach people critical thinking and conversation skills and to help people internalize good judgment and values. The Talmud is chesed – on the right side of the triangle – because it expands minds.

An example of (this) is the law that requires the execution of “the rebellious adolescent” – ben sorir v’moreh. This law is merely a beginning point for a broad discussion of what makes a family work. There was never an adolescent who was executed; the law was never invoked. It merely presents a very provocative point from which to begin a discussion about good parenting. It’s part of a group of three laws that were never invoked:

- 1) The Rebellious Adolescent
- 2) The Rejected Jewish city that is destroyed for idol worship but can be saved if only one house has a mezuzah on it
- 3) The House with Leprosy in its Walls because it was inhabited by people who gossip

It’s very hard for the average person to understand why a law would be given that could never be invoked. Only when one experiences the transformative effect of “Oral Torah” can one appreciate the provocative power of these negative laws.

The book of the Shulchan Aruch is on the left side because it provides structure. It is the compendium of Jewish law that gives individuals and communities the laws necessary to structure a healthy society. This book contains only the conclusions of the discussions in the Talmud, not the legislative process that led to them. Laws are imposed from above by institutions such as courts and police. Laws are required for social discipline. The Oral Torah can help people undergo internal transformation, but laws cannot. The Talmud provides the internal force that makes transformation possible; The Torah says “without laws, courts, and police, human predators would eat each other alive.” The synthesis of the Shulchan Aruch and the Talmud is the improvement of each individual’s abilities to exercise good judgment – tiferet – the ability to improve one’s choices.

